

THE LONDON READER

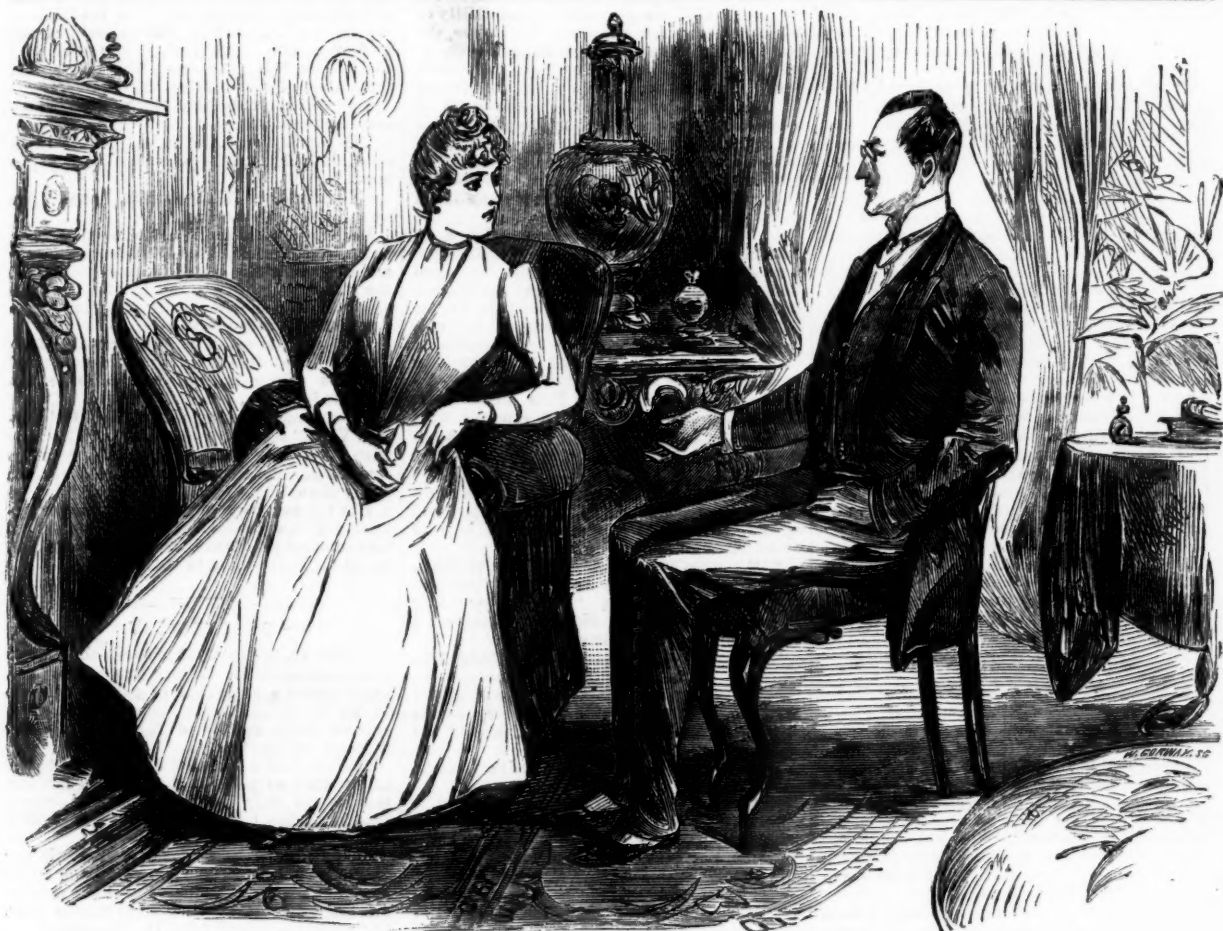
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["TO ME!" ECHOED MADELINE, IN SURPRISE. "HOW IS IT I HAVE NOT HAD IT BEFORE?"]

THE HEIRESS OF DEEPDENE.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSPENSE.

THE inquest on the body of Luke Chalmers did not take place for two days; but although, on the morning following the marriage, John Treherne tried to obtain Godfrey's release by offering very substantial bail, his efforts were not crowned with success.

In the meantime, both Treherne, his wife, and Madeline had received subpoenas to attend at the inquest; and very much alarmed as well as disgusted was poor little Katie, as holding it well at arms' length, as if it had been a highly poisonous reptile—she gazed on the objectionable slip of paper that insisted on her presence before the coroner and his jury.

"What can I tell them?" she exclaimed piteously, going over to her husband, and clinging to his arm like an affectionate kitten. "Will they cross-examine me, Jack? Will they ask me all sorts of horrid questions, and bully

me if I don't answer them? Will they want to know how much I spend a year on my dress, and what my powder costs me?"

"Nonsense, Katie!" broke in John, smiling, in spite of himself. "I am sure I don't know what they will ask you, as you know absolutely nothing of the crime. It's all that officious idiot Fenn's doing. The man is so anxious to prove his capacity for management that he is blundering all along the line. I should like to have an opportunity of telling him a piece of my mind."

"Which, being interpreted, means damaging a part of his body!" observed his wife, who—to do her justice—was trying her very best to keep up the spirits of the others. "By the way, Jack, you might let me do the talking. I'm quite sure I could manage it ever so much better than you; and you could step in when active measures were required. Don't you think that would be best, Madeline?"

"Will they really make me tell what I know?" asked Madeline, taking no notice of the question, and addressing herself to Treherne.

He looked anxious and puzzled.

"I don't think so. No, I'm sure they can't. However, I'll wire up again to Trefusis, and tell him it is a matter of life and death, that he should be present to-morrow at the inquest. He'll pull Godfrey through, if anyone can."

Trefusis was a well-known London criminal lawyer, and Treherne had already telegraphed an urgent request to him to come down as soon as possible.

He arrived that same evening—a rather stout man of about five-and-thirty, with a face as round, and almost as red, as the sun seen through a fog. For nearly the whole of the evening he was closeted with his host, and then Madeline was called in—Katie being, as she expressed it, left out in the cold.

"You need be under no apprehension, Mrs. Vane," the lawyer said; and Madeline started violently, for this was the first time she had been addressed by her new name. "As your husband is already under arrest, he will be cautioned by the coroner against making any statement that might incriminate him, and, on the same grounds, I shall oppose your being called upon to give evidence. Of course,

however, you must attend the inquest, as you have been subpoenaed."

The inquest was held at the village inn, and, needless to say, the room was crowded, for the news that Captain Vane was charged with murder had spread like wildfire, and every body was anxious to learn the result of the proceedings.

The policeman Fenn was the first witness called, and after him came Treherne, who identified the body as that of one of his gardeners. What he had to say the reader already knows, since it amounted to no more than he had told Fenn on the morning of the murder.

Then the village doctor appeared, and proved that death had been caused by a gunshot, and that, considering its position, it was quite impossible the wound could have been self-inflicted.

He was followed by Reginald Earnshaw, who, however, had little to say beyond the fact that when he arrived on the scene of the tragedy Chalmers was quite dead, though the body was still warm.

Next the name of Godfrey Vane was called, but instead of the officer Mr. Trefusis rose, and addressing the coroner, said,—

"I am watching the case on behalf of Captain Vane, sir, and considering the position in which he is now placed, I advise him not to give evidence. Neither should I consent to his wife being called upon to do so."

Madeline's heart beat rapidly, and she felt, rather than saw, Godfrey's gaze upon her, as their marriage was thus publicly alluded to.

The coroner coldly acquiesced in Mr. Trefusis's observation, and shortly afterwards proceeded to sum up briefly, if not impartially, for he was evidently much impressed by Godfrey's silence. Pointing out that Luke Chalmers had died from the effect of a gunshot, and that the wound was not self-inflicted, he left it to the jury to say whether they believed it to be the result of an accident, or of deliberate intention.

The jury retired, but after twenty minutes came back with their verdict.

It was wilful murder against Godfrey Vane.

"Don't despair, we'll pall him through yet!" whispered Trefusis, giving Madeline his arm, and leading her out into the air, for she was so white that he feared she was fainting. "This verdict is merely a formality, which will be set aside at the examination before the magistrates. You see, I did not think it necessary to say anything on Captain Vane's behalf this morning; but later on it will be a different matter, and there are many weak points in the prosecution that I shall be able to take advantage of. In the meantime, I want you to tell me if you remember what clothes your husband was wearing on the morning of the murder?"

Madeline thought for a moment before she replied,—

"Yes, I do remember, because, when he first appeared, Mr. Treherne was chaffing him on being so smart, and he confessed that the suit was new. It was of brown velvet—coat and knickerbockers to match."

As soon as they reached Brackendale, Trefusis took possession of these clothes, and examined them carefully, Madeline and Treherne being present. After he had finished his examination he called them both to his side, and pointed triumphantly to two small round holes in the upper part of the right sleeve.

"Look at these!" he said to John.

"Well!" answered Treherne, somewhat puzzled at his manner. "What of them?"

"Look again, my good fellow!" impatiently repeated the lawyer. "What do you think they are caused by?"

"A match most probably."

"Nonsense, man! What should a match be doing up there? Besides, matches don't burn small clean holes like that. It was a shot!"

John shook his head. He was not quite at

jumping at conclusions, though when he did arrive at one it was generally correct. Madeline, however, with a woman's keenness of perception, guessed immediately what the lawyer meant.

"You mean to say that some of the shots which caused Luke Chalmers' death passed through Captain Vane's sleeve?" she asked excitedly.

Trefusis nodded.

"Yes, that is just what I do mean, and if we prove that, we prove the impossibility of Vane's having fired the shot. Of course, the fact of the coat being new is tremendously in our favour. Besides, I shall have my client's arm examined immediately by the Prison doctor, and he will then find some mark of where the flesh was grazed by the shot."

"Splendid!" cried Treherne, waking up into as much enthusiasm as it was possible for him to betray. "It seems to me we are on the right tack at last. But what made you think of examining the clothes?"

"The idea did not originate with me," returned the lawyer. "Captain Vane slipped a note into my hand this morning, in which he suggested it. The notion had occurred to him because he felt some slight pain in the right shoulder, and he found his skin grazed, and a little inflamed. Then he remembered experiencing a sort of sting while he was struggling with Chalmers, and immediately after the shot was fired. Now I think, Mr. Treherne, I had better deposit the suit with you, and you must put it in some safe place under lock and key, until the time comes for producing it."

The next day Trefusis had a long interview with Godfrey, who was in by no means good spirits, though the lawyer tried his best to encourage him.

"Of course, you are in an awkward position, I don't attempt to deny it," Trefusis said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "but the evidence against you is purely circumstantial, and I think we shall be able to get over it."

"It isn't that altogether," the young man returned, pulling nervously at his moustache; "but in cases of this kind all sorts of affairs are dragged in, and—well, it is just possible something may transpire that I should not care for my wife to hear."

The lawyer gave a low, expressive whistle, and looked at his client gravely enough.

"Whose evidence is it that you dread?" "I don't say I dread it," put in Godfrey, hastily. "That is rather too strong an expression, but I once made a fool of myself over Luke Chalmers' daughter, and—oh! well!" he broke off, knitting his brows, "I should not like Madeline to see her. That is all."

Trefusis looked incredulous, as if this lame explanation did not satisfy him, but he made no remark.

"I suppose the police will contrive to hunt up Ellen Chalmers?" Godfrey continued, after a pause.

"Of course they will," was the prompt response. "It is their business to find out all they can concerning the murdered man, and naturally their first search would be for his daughter."

Godfrey began to pace thoughtfully up and down. Presently he said, interrogatively,—

"Madeline intends coming to the inquiry before the magistrates?"

"Certainly. It is her place, at this juncture, to show confidence in you, and if she stayed away people would be sure to remark her absence. It would be a point against you."

"Nevertheless, I should be very glad indeed if she would stay away!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "Can't you manage to suggest it to her without letting it appear that I desire it?"

"I don't quite see how I can—especially when the circumstances under which you were married are borne in mind."

Godfrey winced, as if the reminder hurt him—and, indeed, since his arrest, he had had plenty of time to think calmly over matters, and he was not sure that he had done right

in availing himself of Madeline's impulsive offer.

After all, she was a very young, and, probably, a very romantic girl, whose judgment was not matured, and whose knowledge of the world was nil, and in the impulse of the moment she had taken a step, the serious nature of which she only half understood.

"I am willing to convey the suggestion in the form of a request from you," added the lawyer, after a pause, "but I decline to take any personal responsibility in the matter. My opinion is that Mrs. Vane should be left perfectly free. However, if you wish it, I will tell her it is your desire that she should remain out of court during the inquiry."

And this he did—very much to Madeline's astonishment.

"Of course I intended going," she said, at once, "but if you think it wisest I will stay at home."

"Your husband thinks so, Mrs. Vane—I give no opinion on the subject."

Madeline looked puzzled. It had struck her, as it struck Trefusis, that a wife's place was by her husband's side on such an occasion, but she was quite willing to fall in with Godfrey's views, though she thought he might have given a reason for his request.

"After all, it will save you a considerable amount of painful feeling if you are not there," observed Trefusis, who was a little embarrassed.

"I was not thinking of myself, but of Captain Vane," she returned simply. "My only wish is to do what is best to prove his innocence, and I have no doubt he knows much better than I do, so I will stay away."

But her heart was sore as she gave the promise, for this message from Godfrey seemed only another proof that, in spite of everything, he was still unwilling to trust her.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALTHOUGH the interval between the inquest and the magisterial inquiry was a short one, yet it meant a great deal of painful suspense to all concerned, more especially as there seemed little chance of throwing any new light on the murder.

Trefusis had a detective down from London, and spared no pains in hunting up evidence that might help his client, but he openly confessed that he had never been engaged in a case that puzzled him so much.

Of course he questioned both Katie and Madeline very closely concerning the events that took place on the morning of the murder, and made an especial point of the time at which Mr. Treherne parted from Dr. Earnshaw.

This she was enabled to tell him accurately, for she looked at her watch immediately afterwards, and it was then ten minutes to one.

"Ten minutes to one," repeated Trefusis, musingly, while he consulted his note book. "Then that disposes of all suspicion concerning Dr. Earnshaw, for Captain and Mrs. Vane both agree that the clock of Brackendale Church struck one after the shot had been fired. That would leave only ten minutes for the doctor to walk a distance of a mile and a half, which is an impossibility. No, my opinion is Earnshaw knows no more than he has already told."

Jack Treherne accompanied Trefusis and the London detective—a sandy-haired man rejoicing in the name of Garlick—when they visited the scene of the murder, from which the public had been rigorously excluded. This was easily enough effected, as the Crawley Woods were private property.

Unfortunately four days had elapsed since poor Chalmers met his death, and it was with little hope of discovering anything fresh that the trio commenced their investigations.

"Still, while there's life there's hope," observed Mr. Garlick, rather inappropriately, as it seemed to Jack. The detective was a slow, silent man, much given to the utterance

of proverbs, perhaps because he found they left a wide margin for possibilities, and did not compromise him as more direct speech would have done.

"For my own part, I have little expectation of anything turning up," remarked Trefusis, grimly. "For you may be sure the ground has been well gone over by Fenn and his subordinates."

Mr. Garlick sniffed.

"I don't know as that goes for anything, sir, if you'll excuse me saying it," he responded, with profound contempt. "These country bumpkins think a lot of themselves, but they ain't up to much in cases of this sort."

"Don't you think so?" said the lawyer, turning away to repress a smile. "Well, I hope you may prove yourself right, Garlick, but in this instance I'm afraid the 'country bumpkins,' as you term them, will be more than a match for you."

Again Mr. Garlick sniffed, evidently little pleased with the suggestion; but, all the same, it had the effect that Trefusis had foreseen, and put him on his mettle.

As a matter of fact, he was a very keen, if not a clever man, and had so trained himself to notice the smallest trivialities that might have any bearing on the case in hand, that he was, not inappropriately, known as the "Ferret."

He examined the ground round about the spot on which the murdered man fell with the greatest minuteness, measured distances, looked into the hollow trunks of trees, turned up dead leaves, and made Trefusis and Jack pose themselves on the very spot, and feign a struggle such as had taken place between Godfrey and Chalmers. Then he himself stood behind the tree, against which Captain Vane's gun had been stationed, and watched attentively for some minutes.

"Whoever fired the gun was a fool!" he observed concisely, as he joined the other two. "There was just as much chance of hitting Captain Vane as Chalmers himself."

"That was proved by the shot grazing Captain Vane's sleeve," returned Trefusis, wringing his shoulders, as if he did not think much of the remark. "But what is that you have in your hand?" he added, with more interest.

"Something that was passed over by Fenn and Company," retorted Garlick, a little spitefully, "and which I found embedded in the leaves close by where the gun was leaning. I think, when you look at it, sir, you won't think our journey has been altogether lost."

Trefusis took it, and Jack Treherne leaned over his shoulders in uncontrollable excitement as he examined it.

It was nothing more nor less than the return half of a second-class railway ticket from London to Brackendale, and the date on it was that of the 15th—the day the murder was committed.

"By Jove, you are right!" exclaimed the lawyer. "This is a most important clue if you can follow it up!"

Garlick nodded assentingly, and then began asking Jack various questions concerning the nearest railway stations, and the distances from them.

"I think I'll leave you now, sir," he said to Trefusis, "and go straight to the station. The sooner I make inquiries the better. I'll see you again this evening, and report progress."

Trefusis acquiesced, and as he and Jack returned home he said,—

"I think we may trust to Garlick to do his best—now."

"Why do you say, 'now'?" inquired Treherne.

"Because he is such an uncertain fellow, and if he doesn't take an interest in a case he won't exert himself in the smallest degree. But his vanity is piqued, and he won't rest satisfied until he has triumphed over 'Fenn and Company,' as he calls them."

Later in the day, the detective made his appearance in Jack's study, where the host

and Trefusis were smoking together. Having accepted a cigar, and a glass of whisky and water, he proceeded to state the result of his investigations.

"First of all, I went to Brackendale Station," he began, "and of all the idiots I ever had to do with, them porters at Brackendale beats everything. Nothing could I get out of them for ever such a long time; they didn't know this, and they couldn't remember that. So at last, being out of patience with them, I took 'em over to the 'Railway Inn,' and treated 'em to a glass of ale all round. Then they could talk fast enough."

"Which proves they were not quite such fools as they looked!" put in Trefusis, slyly. "Eh, Garlick?"

"They're a corrupted lot, sir, that's what they are!" rejoined the detective with energy, and taking at the same time a sip of whisky and water. "After all, I didn't do much good, for all they could tell me was that the London train got down there at just twelve o'clock, and that on the day of the murder there was not a single passenger got out of it. Now that seemed odd, because the ticket has Brackendale upon it. However, I went on to the next station along the line, Crawley, and there the porters were a lot more sensible."

"Perhaps you began with the ale there?" put in Trefusis, laughing.

"You've hit it, sir. I did!"

"Well, and what had the Crawley porters got to tell you?" interposed Jack, impatiently. He felt too anxious to enjoy the lawyer's jokes with Garlick.

"This much, sir. That on the morning of the 15th, a lady got out of the twelve-ten train, and gave up half a return ticket to Brackendale, having, as she said, passed Brackendale by mistake. She paid the difference in the fare, and then walked away from the station. The same lady returned to London the same day, by the four-forty-five, and she took a single ticket from Crawley to Paddington."

"A lady?" exclaimed Treherne and Trefusis, in the same breath. "What description did you obtain of her?" added the latter.

"Not a very satisfactory one, sir. By that, I mean, not one that would enable me to identify her easily. Rather tall, rather slight, dressed in black, and with a thick black veil over her face."

"Why, that is a description that would apply to hundreds of women!" exclaimed Trefusis, in a disappointed tone.

"I know that, sir; but the fault isn't mine, you'll please remember," retorted Garlick, who did not approve of this reception of his news, and was easily nettled at the best of times.

"Of course not! of course not!" hastily. "You have done very well indeed. But go on with your story. I will not interrupt you again."

"As you know, Crawley station is approached by a lane," proceeded Garlick, somewhat appeased by this praise, "and the high road is at the bottom of the lane. I discovered that the lady, on leaving the station, took the turning to the right, which would lead her to Crawley Woods, but on returning she came from the left, thus showing that she had made a tour round of some little distance. It was not until she was entering the gate leading to the platform, and was asked to show her ticket, that she found she had lost it, and, after searching some time, she finally said she would take another. It was this circumstance that fixed the incident on the porter's mind. I asked him if the lady seemed hurried, and he said yes, she did, but he attributed it to the loss of the ticket—naturally enough, too—for women do get hurried when they are searching all over the shop to find a pocket that them fools of dressmakers put in the very back of their skirts, and do their best to hide them!" concluded Mr. Garlick, with a sniff expressive of the utmost disgust.

"And is that all the porter told you?"

"Nearly all, sir. He said that, when the train came in, the lady went up and down until she found an empty compartment, and then she couldn't manage to open the door herself, so he opened it for her; and he noticed, as her hand lay on the handle, that it trembled so much, that she didn't seem able to hold anything. I wired up to Paddington immediately, but I have not had a reply yet. However, I don't suppose I shall get much good out of that; for the woman, whoever she be, is a pretty cool hand, and would probably slip quietly out of the station in the dusk, without anyone noticing her."

"And you really think she had something to do with the murder?" queried Jack Treherne, half-incredulously.

"She may, or she may not," was the cautious answer. "Anyhow, it is a clue worth following up."

"You are right. It is indeed worth following up!" exclaimed Trefusis, energetically. "But, at the same time, it is hard to believe that a woman fired the fatal shot."

Garlick lifted his eyebrows, which was his way of disagreeing.

At that moment there came a loud ring at the bell, followed by a considerable amount of bustle in the hall, and Jack, wondering what could be the matter, went out to see.

As soon as the door closed behind him Garlick drew up a little near Trefusis.

"I wouldn't say it before Mr. Treherne, sir," he whispered, "seeing as he evidently doesn't know much about matters like these, but I don't mind confessing to you that when I was in Crawley Woods this morning, and saw where the murder took place, and from where the gun was fired, I said to myself, 'This looks to me like a woman's work!'"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEALED LETTER.

THE loud ringing of the bell, and the noisy entrance, was caused by no less a person than Miss Keziah Byrne, who, as Mrs. Treherne afterwards expressed it, swooped down upon them like a tigress robbed of its young!

"Oh! Mr. Treherne," she exclaimed, catching sight of Jack, and rushing towards him, "what is this dreadful news I hear about Godfrey? Accused of murder—put in prison! Why, it sounds like a farce. It is too horrible to be true!" and she burst into an hysterical sobbing that very much alarmed poor Jack, unused as he was to such feminine ebullitions.

Soothing her as best he could he led her into the morning-room, where his wife and Madeline were sitting; but no sooner did she catch sight of the latter than her sobs ceased, and she exclaimed, excitedly,—

"What brings that girl here?"

"Be a little more guarded in your language, if you please, Miss Byrne," said Katie, with a quiet dignity that was wonderfully becoming. "This lady is my special friend, and an insult to her is an insult to me."

"But you don't know who and what she is, Mrs. Treherne! If you did you would upbraid her from your feet. That is the arch traitress who undermined poor Sir Richard Vane's mind, until she could turn him round her little finger, and persuade him to disinherit his own nephew. That is the girl who has taken my poor Godfrey's place, and is the author of all his misery. That—"

She was brought to a sudden pause, for Katie rose and pointed majestically to the door.

"Either you cease speaking in this strain, or you leave my house! You don't know whom you are addressing. This lady is Captain Vane's wife!"

If a thunderbolt had suddenly exploded at Miss Byrne's feet she could not have been more agast.

To say she grew pale is to say little. Her face became absolutely grey, and she stared from Madeline to Katie, and back again, in a

bewilderment that even deprived her of the power of speech.

Then she turned to Jack Treherne, who was keeping discreetly in the background.

"Is this true?" she gasped.

"Quite true. Miss Brereton married your brother immediately before his arrest."

"Then he deserves any evil that may come upon him!" she declared, vindictively; "and it is through her the evil has come upon him! Whatever harm may befall Godfrey will lie at her gate. You need not glare at me, Mrs. Treherne. I shall not be under your roof-tree many minutes longer, for nothing would induce me to stay where that designing creature was! But I'll speak my mind while I am here, and neither you nor your husband nor anyone else shall prevent me. Between you, you have got my poor brother into a nice mess, and I should think he'll rue the day that brought him to Brackendale. I shall rue it for him—of that I am certain!"

Then, with one parting glance of utmost malevolence in the direction of Madeline, she walked out again, and presently the front door was heard banging behind her.

For a few minutes no one spoke; then Katie burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, in which her husband joined.

"There's a nice, gentle, amiable type of womanhood!" she exclaimed at last, waving her hand towards the door. "Upon my word, I'm not easily frightened, but I must confess that that glare of hers made me feel absolutely nervous. As for you, Madeline, she looked as if she could have killed you! Well, thank Heaven we are rid of her! I'm afraid, my dear, I can't congratulate you on your new sister-in-law."

Madeline smiled faintly, but the smile hardly concealed the pained expression in her eyes. She was too young and too sensitive to be able to ignore Miss Byrne's insults as they deserved.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Jack, with a shudder, "one wonders why Providence permits such women to exist. They are living liars on their sex. Keziah Byrne has only one redeeming trait, and that is her devotion to Godfrey."

"A devotion that he finds embarrassing now and again, I should imagine," added his wife. "Don't you remember, when he stayed with us last year, how she heard he had a cold, and insisted on coming down to nurse him? Poor Godfrey! I shall never forget his face when she turned up in the drawing-room, where he and I were playing chess together. He looked as if he could very well have dispensed with her affection at that particular moment."

Miss Byrne was true to her resolve not to set foot within Brackendale House again; but, in order to be near her half-brother, she took apartments quite close to the county prison, although, greatly to his astonishment, she refused to avail herself of the permission to see him that the might easily have obtained, and contented herself with writing notes, to which he sent back answers.

Garlick, meanwhile, continued his inquiries, and even took a hasty journey to Paddington to see if he could find any traces of the mysterious female who had appeared and disappeared so strangely. But he was hardly surprised at his non-success, for, as he told Trefusis, he had not expected to trace her in that way.

More to the purpose were his investigations round about Crawley and Brackendale, where he visited every house within a distance of three miles from the station, to see if any lady guest had arrived on the morning of the fifteenth.

Fortunately for him, it was not a largely populated neighbourhood, and he was able to assure himself that the lady in question had not entered any house within the radius of the three miles, although he obtained news of her.

A boy, who was working in the fields close to Crawley Wood, had seen a lady dressed as the porter described, coming from the wood at

a little after one o'clock on the day of the murder. He was sure of the time, for he was going home to his dinner, and it was not half-past one when he reached home.

Then, some two miles further on, the lady had been seen again, this time by a woman, whose cottage she passed, and from whom she inquired the nearest way to Crawley Station.

The woman told her she was some distance from Crawley, but Brackendale station was comparatively close at hand.

She had answered rather hastily that Brackendale would not do. She must go to Crawley, and the woman thereupon directed her.

"She seemed as if summat had upset her," the woman observed, in reply to Garlick's question, "and she was in a sort of hurry too—wouldn't wait to hear all I had to say, even after she had asked me the question. Her veil was down, so I couldn't see much of her face, for it was one of those thick black gauze ones that are hard to see through."

All this confirmed Garlick's idea, and Trefusis agreed with him that the veiled lady could throw some important light on the crime, even if she did not actually commit it herself.

"But I think she did!" asserted the detective, in confidence. "I've had some experience of murder cases, and the whole thing looks to me like a woman's handiwork. It's a pity Captain Vane is so close about it."

For Godfrey, when questioned, declared himself absolutely unable to guess who the lady might be, and could offer no suggestions calculated to help the men who were working on his behalf.

At length the day appointed for the inquiry arrived, and early in the morning Katie and Jack Treherne, accompanied by Trefusis, drove off in the brougham, while Madeline watched them with a sinking heart from the window.

She felt miserably lonely, and depressed. Suppose, after all, her sacrifice had been in vain, and Godfrey were condemned on the circumstantial evidence!

How slowly the weary hours dragged themselves by! She could neither read, write, nor work; and when luncheon was brought in she turned from it with disgust. It seemed to her as if the afternoon would never draw to an end.

About three o'clock the door of the room in which she was sitting was suddenly opened by a servant, who announced,—

"Mr. Walters!"

And then entered Sir Richard Vane's old solicitor, who, as is known to the reader, was also Madeline's guardian.

He was not an especial favourite of our heroine's, and yet, at that precise moment, she was unfeignedly glad to see him.

"I have only just heard of your marriage," he said, taking a seat near her, while his eyes rested on her wedding-ring. "Perhaps congratulation may, under the circumstances, be out of place, but, all the same, I hope your married life will prove happier than its commencement."

It was rather a grim way of putting it; but Mr. Walters was not one of the suave type of solicitors, and would not play the hypocrite even to oblige a client.

Madeline looked down in some embarrassment.

"I feel I ought to have written to you myself," she said, "but the circumstances were so peculiar, and—"

"You need not explain. I understand perfectly how the case stands, but a marriage is a marriage, and you'll have to abide by it. So far as your fortune goes it's all right until you come of age, and by that time you'll know more of the world, and be better able to take care of yourself. But that is not what I have come to say. I had two objects in view. One was to ask you if my advice could be of any service to you, and if so to place it at your disposal—"

He pulled himself up short, and waited a

minute for her to speak, but Madeline only shook her head silently.

"Ah, well!" he continued, looking perhaps a trifle disappointed, "you young people think you know better than we older ones, and I suppose in a certain degree you are right. Now I come to the second reason of my being here. I wanted to give you this," he took from his pocket a blue envelope, with an important looking seal upon it, and handed it to her. "This contains a letter written by Sir Richard Vane to you."

"To me!" echoed Madeline, in surprise. "How is it I have not had it before?"

"I would have told you if you had permitted me to finish," answered Mr. Walters, imperturbably. "It was placed in my hands by Sir Richard himself, with instructions to give it to you on the day you came of age, or when you married. I am unaware of its contents, but I judge them to be of some importance, otherwise Sir Richard would not have made a mystery of them. And now I will take my leave," rising as he spoke.

"But you will stay and have some tea?" exclaimed Madeline, ringing the bell.

"Certainly not, my dear young lady!" answered the solicitor, with pious horror. "I have never yet tried to ruin my digestion with afternoon tea, and, please Heaven, I never will!"

He held out his hand, and Madeline, as she placed hers within it, said hesitatingly,—

"You are aware of the accusation brought against Captain Vane?"

Mr. Walters's face changed, and he made an impatient movement of dismissal.

"Yes; but I have no wish to discuss it with you," and so saying, he hastily and unceremoniously left the room.

After his departure, Madeline slowly broke the seal of the letter; and inside she found a second envelope, also sealed, and bearing her own name, in the handwriting of Sir Richard. Below it was written,—

"Not to be opened until after my death, and then only when Madeline Brereton shall attain the age of twenty-one, or shall marry."

The girl looked at it for a few seconds, then finally put it away in her pocket, determining to read it the next day, when her mind would be less disturbed; and hardly had she come to this conclusion when the door was opened, and this time Katie Treherne stood on the threshold.

Madeline knew by her expression that the examination was at an end.

(To be continued.)

THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

CHAPTER XXXV.—(continued.)

LORRAINE hesitated. In his wild despair of some minutes before he had declared that he would make a thorough confession of his entire villainy towards Walter, and restore him to his rightful position; and had the youth awakened then, it is probable that he would have done so. But now he could not do it. It was true that he loved the artist better than he did his own son, but his interests were entwined with the fortunes of the latter; and, besides, if he confessed, punishment awaited him for his misdeeds. He thought he could explain his abduction satisfactorily to Walter, take him back to London, and tell Raymond that he had found it impossible to carry out his plan, for to carry it out he felt would be like severing a limb from his own body.

"Why did Lord Rosenbury employ you to carry me off?" repeated Walter.

"Because," stammered Lorraine, giving the first reason that occurred to him, "Indehp wanted girl."

"Ah! And what were you to do with me?"

"Land on desolate island up north some-

where, an' leave you fate: Ludship thought you'd die there!"

This revelation at first seemed incredible to Walter, but he soon became convinced of its truth, and said:—

"And was this the cause of your late visit to Rosenbury House? Did you go there that you and his lordship might arrange a plan to entrap me into your hands?"

Lorraine nodded, not knowing what to reply. "And you and he pretended that you called to demand his influence in my behalf!" exclaimed Walter, his voice full of sadness.

"And the only relative I have in the world—my own father—will make a bargain with a stranger to kill me?"

"Oh, no!" sobbed Lorraine, penitently. "Thoughts fish man take you off. Tended to left you money. Wasn't going push you off rocks into water, as ludship said—"

"Ah! rather an extensive plot, I see!" said the artist. "Now tell me all about it. Conceal nothing from me. Tell me all you know of Rosenbury's plans in regard to Lady Geraldine. Speak quickly!"

The authoritative voice and stern countenance of Walter compelled Lorraine's obedience, and he proceeded to explain as well as he could without betraying the secret relationship existing between him and Rosenbury.

"So his lordship considers me his rival," summed up the listener when he had concluded, "and proposed to you to buy a sloop, get me aboard of it, drug me, and carry me off to a northern island, where you should leave me to starve. And after my death he expected to win Lady Geraldine. And all this would have been carried out if remorse had not entered your heart. It seems, then, that you have a little paternal affection yet."

"Yes—yes!" gasped the miserable Lorraine. "Well, his lordship's plan is defeated," said Walter, "and he has rendered himself liable to the law. He will find that he cannot carry off people in this manner without answering for it!"

"Oh, don't 'rest ludship, Wal'er," pleaded Lorraine, alarmed for his son. "'Rest me—punish me—but don't touch him!"

"I will not," answered the youth, more calmly. "I will not spare him for his own sake, but for that of his mother, for the sake of the honourable name he bears, and for the sake of his dead parent. What would the late Lord Rosenbury have thought could he have known his son a would-be murderer?"

"You'll 'rest me, then, Wal'er?" asked Lorraine, apprehensively.

"No, I shall not. I shall not even reproach you. You own thoughts must be sufficient punishment. If want of money has driven you to sell your son's life to his enemy let me know it, and you shall have sufficient to live upon."

Lorraine had expected reproaches, threat, perhaps to be even delivered into the hands of the law, and Walter's lenity touched him to the heart's core. The little good that was in him made itself felt, and he regarded the artist with an expression almost of adoration.

"Oh, Wal'er," he sobbed, "if Raymon' 'd only—"

"Raymond!" repeated Walter. "You are strangely familiar with Lord Rosenbury. I suppose," he added, noticing Lorraine's confusion, "crime knows no aristocracy. I want you to tell me how your singular acquaintance with his lordship commenced."

The youth had dropped his air of respect, which his sense of filial duty had always caused him to adopt, and spoke with an air of gentle authority, which well became him, and which caused Lorraine to regard him with increased affection, and a sort of veneration. In his own mind the ex-gardener now invested the youth with his titles and honours, and regarded him as Lord Rosenbury, whereas, formerly, he had always thought of him as an artist, with a sort of paternal feeling towards him.

"Way happened," he replied, quite humbly, "waa's I wanted money, more'n you gave me. Went to ludship, 'cause was old tenant' family. Ludship gave me trifle, spoke your wanting his girl, and fin'ly asked me to call 'gain. Then went other day, and you's there. Thought I'd sink. Ludship came rescue, an' we made bargain."

"But I don't understand how Rosenbury could dare to broach such a plot to the father of his intended victim," returned Walter, thoughtfully. "There's something yet behind all this—something I haven't fathomed!"

"Oh, no, Wal'er!" cried Lorraine, in alarm. "No such thing. I might said somethin' lightly 'gainst you that 'courage Ray—ludship, I mean—but you know whole story!"

Walter was not quite convinced that he did know the whole story. Lorraine's very eagerness in making the assertion caused him to doubt it, but he kept his thoughts to himself.

"It seems strange to me also," he mused, "that Rosenbury should want to kill me because I am accepted and he rejected by Lady Geraldine. In these days, and in England, people are not wont to put their rivals out of the way. It seems to me that the cause is rather small for such a deed."

Lorraine hastened to produce arguments to the contrary, urging the beauty and wealth of Lady Geraldine, the fact that Rosenbury loved her with mad passion, and that, in Italy and other tropical countries, it was a common thing to murder a rival. When he had concluded his rather incoherent speech, he pleaded:—

"You'll forgive me then, won't you, Wal'er!"

"Yes, I forgive you. But you must not go near Rosenbury again. Do not even explain to him how I escaped the fate he intended for me."

Lorraine promised to obey Walter's command, and appeared delighted on being restored to his favour, kissing his hands and hastening to dry his own tears.

"How far are we from London?" asked the artist, after a pause.

"I don't know, Wal'er; a great way, though!"

"Then you must land me somewhere on the coast, and I will proceed to town by rail. I had an appointment last evening, and my failure to keep it must have created alarm."

"Oh, go back in the sloop, Wal'er!" cried Lorraine. "I shall kill 'self if 'bliged to go back 'lone. Turn the sloop in minute. If forgive me, go back with me!"

Walter reflected a moment. He knew that his companion's heart was softened to an unusual degree by the events of that day, and it seemed to him that he had now an excellent opportunity of leading him into the paths of virtue and uprightness. His heart inclined him to take the quickest route home, and soothe the fears of his betrothed, and his sense of filial duty bade him yield his inclinations, and use this opportunity of instructing Lorraine. With a sigh, he said:—

"I will return with you in the sloop, as I wish to have a very long talk with you. But I must go ashore somewhere and post a letter to Lady Geraldine, with whom I made my appointment for last evening. She will get it the first thing in the morning, while we shall not arrive before to-morrow evening or the following day. Have you pen and paper?"

Lorraine could not object to this movement, and searched for the articles required, but in vain.

"Well, never mind. I have paper and pencil in my note-book, and a stamped envelope, too. How fortunate!"

The letter was hastily written, while Lorraine went on deck and gave the order to go towards the shore, and it briefly stated that he had been carried away to sea by canoes beyond his control, but that he was now about to return, and would soon meet her at their friends. It concluded by begging her to say

nothing of the letter to any one, or to intimate that she had heard from him.

This note was enclosed in the envelope, which was addressed in pencil, and Walter then followed Lorraine to the deck.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Sir, you are very welcome.

It must appear in other ways than words, Therefore I scant this breathing courtesy.

—Shakespeare.

As Walter appeared on deck Lorraine hastened forward to meet him, expressing his delight at finding him so far restored to his usual health, and imploring him not to betray him to Jack Marlow, who now entertained great respect for him. Walter readily assented to this request, and took Lorraine's arm, determined to treat him with the utmost kindness in order to give his future address double weight.

This kindness—so generous and undeserved—produced a great impression upon Lorraine, who was considerably sobered. He had been little used to gentleness or tenderness throughout his erring life. He had always received what he deserved in the way of harsh words, and was used to them. His late wife, obsequiously tender as she had been of her supposed son, the victim of such terrible wrong, had found keen, sharp words for her husband whenever he had entered his cottage, the more so as he was the cause of the remorse she had endured. Others were not kinder than she had been, and when he had come in contact with the world he had found things no better. Since his return from Australia he had had bitter experience with his ungrateful son, and Walter's kindness to him was like rain upon a parched soil.

"Jack's headed sloop in for land," he remarked, conducting the artist towards the seaman. "You can go 'shore 'fore dark, an' post letter, can't he, Jack?"

The seaman replied in the affirmative, adding that they were going at a remarkable rate of speed.

In the fresh air Walter's strength and spirits returned to him, and he walked back and forth on the deck, leaning on Lorraine's arm, which it was impossible to refuse, it being offered with a pleading look and deprecating manner.

"Mas' be hungry, Wal'er," said the sloop-owner, after he had exhausted himself with his efforts to walk steadily. "Plenty in cupboard. Come have something—you can trust me."

Walter felt sure that he could, and feeling hungry, led the way to the cabin, where Lorraine proceeded to set out his most tempting edibles. To these, he added a bottle of wine and another of brandy.

"Needn't be afraid drink out these bottles, Wal'er," he remarked, as he took his seat at the table. "To show all right, tase 'em 'self first."

He was about to pour out a dram for his use, when Walter, with gentle firmness, took the bottle from his hand, and removed both liquors to the cupboard, which he locked, putting the key in his pocket.

"You've had enough already," he said, explaining, "too much for your own good. You know I don't like you to drink liquor at all."

Lorraine would have remonstrated or rebelled against this act, but he dared not raise his will against the mild authority of the young artist. He tried then to look sullen, but having had no dinner, his appetite got the better of his resolution, and he ate heartily, and was soon talking as busily as ever.

"If instead of buying all that poisonous stuff," said Walter, after a long silence, "you had bought a spirit-lamp and some coffee, you would have done better!"

"I've got the lamp and the coffee too," said Lorraine, eagerly. "They are in the cupboard. I'll get them!"

Walter motioned him to keep his seat, while he got them out, lighted the lamp, and put some coffee in the little tin pot.

"Now, where's the water?" he asked.

"Wa'r?" exclaimed Lorraine. "S'pose forgot wa'r? Not drop on board. Coffee made with wa'r always 'spid stuff. Couldn't you make't with wine? That would be something like, eh?"

"There must be water on board," replied the artist, unable to repress a smile. "I'll ask your sailor?"

He put the key of the cupboard back in his pocket, and then went in search of water.

Jack informed him that there was a cask of it on board, which he had got fresh in London the previous day, and he offered to draw a pail of it. With this, Walter returned to the cabin, made his beverage, and, with sugar, it was found very palatable. Jack was given a liberal supply of it, much to his satisfaction.

When the meal was over they returned to the deck, and Lorraine seated himself at the helm, in order that his seaman might have an opportunity of eating his supper. This did not take long, Mr. Marlow having paid more frequent visits to the larder during the day than if its supplies had been paid for out of his own pocket.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in watching the sails, the rapidly nearing coasts, and in conversing upon the topics already discussed. Before the evening came on they ran into a little cove, and landed upon a strip of beach by means of the small boat.

"I see no village here!" observed Walter, looking up and down the shore and then inland. "Ah, I see a farm-house. Stay on the sloop, father, with Jack, while I go to the house and inquire the way to the nearest post-office. When I call to you from the beach, you can come for me in the little boat. I may be gone a couple of hours."

Lorraine was almost afraid to trust him out of his sight lest he should not return, and exacted another promise that he would not proceed to London otherwise than by the sloop.

Walter then proceeded inland towards the farmhouse that had attracted his attention, and the two men returned to the *Pretty Polly*.

On reaching the dwelling the artist encountered its proprietor, who informed him that the nearest post-office was three miles distant, at Barleyford, and that a straight road conducted to that village. Thanking him for the information, Walter proceeded to walk the distance.

It was a pleasant country road, bordered with green hedges and fragrant with the flowers that grew along its sides, and with a considerable colony of birds through its entire length, making the air musical. The music and the fragrance seemed to mingle with thoughts of Geraldine in the artist's mind—he was so used to associating all things beautiful with her—and a happy smile curved his lips.

"Poor little darling!" he murmured, tenderly, his heart yearning over her. "She has been alarmed about me to-day. Perhaps she has induced Lady Rosenbury to send to my studio to inquire after me, and poor frightened Parkins has declared his belief that I have got killed somehow. Parkins always fancied that I had come to grief if I happened to remain out an hour longer than I intended. I should like to go by rail instead of sending my letter, but my duty lies first with my misguided, unhappy father!"

He sighed as he concluded his musings, and looked sad for a few moments; but he was not possessed of a melancholy temperament, and soon smiled again. It was his custom to look always upon the bright side of life, to count the blessings, and ignore as much as possible the sorrows in his lot, and he was speedily congratulating himself that he was possessed of the love of Lady Geraldine and Lady Rosenbury, and that he had so slight a draw-

back upon his happiness as his worthless, drunken father.

His joyous, youthful spirit showed itself in his very footsteps, which pressed the ground so lightly, speeding over the surface as if for a wager.

The three miles were soon passed, and he found his way to the post-office, a pretentious little building, where he posted his letter, and learned that within an hour it would be on its way to London, and that it might not arrive too late for delivery that night.

"If not, she'll get it the first thing in the morning," he thought, as he turned away.

As he passed out again, he paused a moment on the broad steps to rest himself, and overheard a scrap of conversation between two men who had just met.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed one, in a tone of surprise not unminged with fear. "A maniac escaped from an asylum somewhere, and may be wandering in this direction! Why, we shall all be murdered in our beds! What's the lunatic's name?"

"John Smith. He's very dangerous, as he has the way of appearing quite sane until touched on his weak point. He thinks he's some great man or another—some duke or prince, I suppose! They offer a big reward for him! I wish I could finger it!"

"Where did he escape from?"

"Mure Hall, I think the asylum is called. He escaped last night, and is supposed to be in the company of a rascally-keeper, whom he has deceived into thinking him sane, or else who hopes to make his relatives pay something to ransom him. A Mr. Mure, a brother of the doctor who keeps the asylum, passed through Barleyford this morning on the look-out for the fugitive, and to warn us to be on our guard. He said the lunatic's relations are wealthy tradesmen. I hope they'll find him before he can do any injury!"

"So do I!" responded the other. "But the fellow couldn't deceive me into thinking him sane. I could tell that he wasn't quite right the minute I set eyes on him!"

As he uttered this declaration he caught sight of Walter, who was listening attentively, and the idea evidently seized the provincial that he was at that moment regarding the lunatic in question.

Nudging his companion to look at the stranger, he excitedly whispered,—

"Did this Mure describe the chap? I wouldn't wonder if we had him here. We'll divide the reward!"

Walter could not avoid smiling at the idea of being taken for a demented individual, and his smile increased to positive laughter as he noticed how keenly the two villagers surveyed him.

His tawny hair, his violet eyes, his careless monotone, every feature of his noble and spirited countenance, was pondered over by the provincials, but at length one of them said, in a tone of disappointment,—

"This ain't the man. He's an elderly chap, with grey hair, a complexion as pale as death, lines around his eyes, and looks about used up. The crazy man looks sick, too!"

"You are sure this ain't the person?"

"Sure," was the reluctant response. "At least, he don't answer the description. An old party couldn't be disguised to look like this young one, of course!"

The villagers having reluctantly decided that he was not the person for whom the reward was offered, Walter resumed his course towards the coast, where the *Pretty Polly* awaited him.

His amusement having subsided, his graver thoughts recurred to the conversation he had overheard, and he was irresistibly reminded of the fugitive he had encountered on the shores of Rock Land.

How singular that two fugitives from such asylums should have crossed his path within such a short time of each other!

As he thus mused, the idea was suggested—Why were not these fugitives one and the same person? It did not seem probable that the one he had had seen carried away in the

mysterious yacht could have so soon effected another escape, yet it was quite possible that he had done so. The description, particularly that referring to the person, answered to that of the man he had aided at Rock Land.

The more Walter thought upon the subject the more he became convinced that the fugitive of whom he had just heard was the one in whom he was so much interested.

"The poor gentleman very likely succeeded in secreting the money I gave him," he thought, "and used a part of it to bribe the keeper who departed with him. He will want to hide from his enemies, and I dare say he took the first train to London, and sought me at my lodgings. In that case, Parkins either took him in as my friend to await my return, which was expected every moment, of course, or else he sent him to a good hotel, and told him to call again. But he might not have money to pay his way at an hotel, and his appearance, I own, was suspiciously wild. Perhaps at this moment he is again in the hands of his enemies."

He quickened his pace at the thought. It was twilight when Walter stood upon the post-office steps, and the evening deepened rapidly as he traversed the lonely road at a much slower pace than before.

The drag he had taken had not entirely lost its effects yet, for he felt tired and as if needing sleep. He did not pause by the roadside to rest, but his flagging steps showed that he needed to do so.

"If I only knew for certain that they were talking of my fugitive!" his thoughts continued. "And yet I am quite certain of the fact, I wish I had inquired farther of those villagers. I know the poor gentleman would seek me—he seemed so grateful for the assistance I was able to render him. I fear Parkins wouldn't put him into my rooms and tell him to stay till I come—Parkins is so suspicious of everybody. Perhaps the fugitive is wandering about the streets of London—perhaps waiting for me at my door! I ought to return to town by the next train, and I must! In order to do my duty by everybody, father included, I will return to the sloop, tell father my intentions, send Jack with the vessel to London, and take father to town with myself by rail, so that I can look after the fate of my unknown friend."

Having made up his mind as to his course of action, the way seemed unusually long in returning to the vessel.

His way was lighted by the brilliant starlight, but he noticed neither fragrance nor music now, his thoughts being intent on his benevolent schemes. In the course of time he arrived at the farm-house, from whose proprietor he had learned the way to the post-office, and from this point he saw the sloop lying in the little cove. Quickening his steps, he hastened to the little cove, and called loudly to Lorraine and Jack to come ashore for him.

"I need not go aboard at all," he thought, pacing up and down the sands as he awaited them. "I will send Jack off immediately, and turn back, with father, for Barleyford. He will hardly dare object, but if he does, his objections will do no good."

At this moment his attention was attracted towards the sloop, where the seaman was engaged in assisting his employer into the little boat, and, from Lorraine's apparent helplessness, Walter concluded that he had not yet entirely recovered from the effects of his day's potations.

"Oh, Heaven!" he said, with bitter emphasis. "And that man is my father—the author of my being! I could find it in my heart to doubt the fact! Heaven pity the man who has a father whom he can neither love nor respect!"

He turned away his head that he might avoid the sight of Lorraine, and, as he did so, his eyes rested upon a black spot upon the sands at some little distance.

"What's that?" he said, involuntarily. "It looks like a human figure. I must see!"

He hastened towards it, and, as he approached it, he saw that the object was indeed a man, who was lying upon the beach, fever-stricken and delirious. A closer scrutiny caused him to recognize the flushed, upturned face and the wild voice.

"It is my fugitive!" he ejaculated. "Thank Heaven, I have found him!"

He stooped and raised the poor gentleman in his arms, staggering with his burden along the beach, at the same time calling to the seaman and Lorraine, who had landed, for assistance.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Think not the good,
The gentle deeds of mercy thou hast done,
Shall die forgotten all; the poor, the prisoner,
The fatherless, the friendless, and the widow,
Who daily own the bounty of thy hand,
Shall cry to Heaven and pull a blessing on thee.
—Rowe.

LORRAINE and Jack Marlow, on hearing Walter's summons, hastened towards him, while the young artist continued to advance with his burden in his arms. Jack came up first, and Walter explained to him that he had unexpectedly encountered a friend who was very ill, and who must be carried aboard the sloop, and then taken to London, adding,—

"So take hold of him, my good man, and assist me to carry him to the boat!"

Jack obeyed, insisting, however, upon carrying the struggling fugitive alone, because, as he explained, the young gentleman did not look well. The worthy sailor had viewed the strange occurrence of the day, including Walter's seclusion in the cabin, Lorraine's singular manner and conduct, and the artist's going ashore, without the least suspicion that anything was wrong between his passengers. During Walter's absence, Lorraine had not ventured to explain that the sloop must immediately return to London, and Jack had just received his first intimation to that effect.

As he proceeded in advance of the artist towards the boat, the sailor soon met the owner of the sloop, whose progress over the sands had been much slower than his own, and he slackened his pace, as he said,—

"Your son, sir, has found a sick friend, and says as we are to sail for London direct!"

"Yes, sail for London," replied Lorraine. "But sick friend? Don't understand. Go on, while speak, my son!"

He waved his hand to Jack to proceed, and then stood still, waiting for Walter. The latter had walked slowly, looking up and down the coast with a fear that the pursuers might be on the track of the fugitive, but he soon came up with Lorraine, who hastened to ask him who his sick friend was, where he had become acquainted with him, and how he had now found him.

"I cannot explain to you anything about him at present," replied Walter. "I met him under peculiar circumstances, and know very little of him except that he has enlisted my sympathies and friendship!"

"He didn't come from village with you," returned Lorraine, evidently hurt at the artist's reticence. "You found him lyin' on beach. Saw you pick him up—so can't he anybody be lyin' 'bout loose this manner!"

Walter made no reply, but by the time they reached the boat Lorraine had dismissed his momentary peevishness, and recovered his usual good humour.

Jack had already deposited the fugitive in the bottom of the boat, and as soon as his employer and Walter had entered it, he pushed it off, sprang in, and rowed rapidly towards the sloop.

There was but little difficulty in lifting the fugitive to the deck of the *Pretty Polly*, and Jack carried him to the cabin, laying him in one of the berths, then returning to his duties, getting the sloop under way for London.

Lorraine followed Walter to the cabin, his curiosity in regard to the stranger being

almost uncontrollable, and seated himself upon a stool to watch the young artist's movements. These consisted in bathing the flushed, fevered face, combing the tangled hair, loosening the garments, removing the shoes, and making the poor fugitive as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances.

When these preparations were completed, Walter turned down the light of the lantern, which Jack had lighted during his absence.

"S'pose you've finished, Walter?" observed Lorraine, as the artist at last seated himself beside his patient, feeling his pulse. "Might tell me who person is comes in an' takes possession of sloop, disturbing domestic arrangements. Due to me as host to know 's position!"

"He is a gentleman," responded Walter. "In due time you shall know all that I know about him. At present, I have no right to communicate even the small knowledge I have gained concerning him!"

Lorraine put on an injured air, lapsing into silence, during which he paid the utmost attention to the mutterings and ravings of the invalid, but at length he remarked,—

"Can't be gentleman, Walter. Ain't even 'spectable. Hear him talk dungeons, chains, gratin's, and bread water! Just escaped prison, bet anything on it. But, 'course, none my business. You'll come grief through this very person—see if don't! Needn't come me for comfort if do. Idea gentleman! Minute set eyes on him knew he's no better 'n should be!"

"Are any of us better than we should be!" replied Walter, smiling. "If you entertain any distrust of our guest, just look at his face! Worn as it is with suffering you cannot help seeing on it the impress of an honourable character!"

Lorraine arose and looked at the invalid, and acknowledged that the artist had spoken truly, and that the invalid looked like a gentleman.

"Evidently person consequence," he muttered, resuming his seat. "Speaks such excellent grammar 'clined to think he's curate, or schoolmaster, or 'baesador. S'pose I'm not 'nough consequence know who is. Only Colts Lorraine, old guardian, mis'ble old fasher, not fit live!"

The owner of the sloop continued in this manner for some time, delighting, as it seemed, in reviling himself and heaping contumely upon his own head, his personal vituperations being all the fiercer because Walter did not hasten to contradict him and declare that he wronged himself, and should instantly know all about the mysterious stranger.

When at length he paused for want of breath, Walter said, quietly,—

"Can't you speak in a little lower tone, father? I think the sound of your voice excites our guest!"

Lorraine looked confused and bewildered at this reception of his rambling denunciations of himself, and again became silent.

After a period of reflection, he looked at the artist, rather timidly at first, and then with more assurance, and then, assuming a jovial air, he tipped back his hat, saying,—

"Well, Walter, ain't time supper? Hungry's shark. Jes' give me key cupboard, so can get something eat! 'Clare this son-air gives awful appetite!"

Instead of yielding up the key as requested Walter unlocked the cupboard, set out sufficient food for an ample repast for three, and then said, as he put the key back in his pocket,—

"When you have eaten you had better take Jack his meal. I hope the poor fellow gets enough to eat!"

Lorraine made no reply. He had not demanded the key on account of hunger, but because his stimulants were all in the closet, and he wished to refresh himself with them. Walter, however, did not seem to comprehend his real motive, but took his seat at the table, applying himself to the manufacture of

some excellent coffee, talking cheerfully and pleasantly as he did so; and before the beverage was ready for use Lorraine's brow had cleared, and his sullen, injured look vanished.

"There, isn't that a delicious odour?" asked Walter, as the fragrant coffee scented the cabin. "It is better than before. Come to the table, father."

Lorraine refused; but as Walter poured for him a brimming cup of the beverage and dropped into it several tempting white lumps of sugar, his resistance gave way; he drew forward his chair, and was again himself.

As young gentlemen usually at convivial suppers exert themselves to amuse and interest their companions by their wit and humour, so Walter now exerted himself to please the man he deemed his father. And Lorraine allowed his attention to be diverted from the cupboard and from his guest's identity, and told stories of his experiences in Australia and elsewhere—stories so totally devoid of interest to the listener that it showed a good heart and great self-control in him to keep up his gentle smile and occasional remarks.

With all his attention to Lorraine, Walter did not neglect his guest, and as he bent over him, smoothing his pillow, the owner of the sloop remarked,—

"Walter, you ought give him somethin' eat. P'raps a drop of somethin' drink might help him. When I've been sick 'fore now, a drop drink has fetched me round d'rectly."

"He is better without food," replied Walter; "and as to drink, I give him water. But what were you saying about the miner?"

Lorraine immediately resumed his narrative, which continued until he became too sleepy to speak coherently, and then he said,—

"Think I'll go bed, Walter. Was up last night. If need assistance, can call me."

Removing his outer garments he crept into the upper berth, and was soon asleep. When this state was announced by an unconscious snore, Walter mused,—

"I think I made a good beginning with him to-night. In the morning I will have a long talk with him, and endeavour to reclaim him from his present course. How singular that Rosenberg should apply to my own father to kill me! I cannot comprehend it. And that my father should consent to murder his own son seems incredible! There is something behind this that I don't understand. Lord Rosenberg must have some hold upon my father. But what can it be?"

While he considered the subject, the young artist went out upon the deck with the food which Lorraine had forgotten to take to Jack, and the sailor now accepted it, declaring, however, that he had stored a quantity of things in his department, and all he asked for from the cabin was an occasional cup of hot coffee.

Walter returned to the cabin, warmed what remained of the coffee already made, and brought it to the sailor, apologising for having forgotten it before.

"Oh, it's no matter, sir," responded Jack, politely. "It's better now'n earlier, since I've got to be up all night. The old gentleman, begin' your pardon, sir, won't take my turn to-night, I s'pose?"

"He is asleep, Jack, but you can let me know when you want to sleep, and I can say I can manage the sloop. I know something about the managements of small vessels."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of troublin' you," returned the sailor. "I can keep awake to-night, and p'raps in the mornin' your pa might like to take my place a little while."

Walter repeated his offer, and soon after returned to the cabin and his patient.

Notwithstanding his assurances, and the strength of the coffee, Jack went to sleep at his post, and the artist concluded to allow the little vessel to lie to until morning is being impossible for him to attend to it and the invalid at once.

All night the poor fever-stricken fugitive raved of his long imprisonment, of a terrible

and powerful enemy, of a gentle and loving daughter, who was dearer to him than life, and by turns he pleaded piteously for release and freedom, and struggled with imaginary fetters. He tried to leave his berth, but every time he started up Walter's gentle hand was placed on his hot forehead, and Walter's gentle voice breathed comforting assurances, which, though not understood, seemed to reassure the invalid.

But, in all his ravings, the patient did not let fall a single clue to his identity, did not mention the name of his enemy, and called his daughter only by those pet names familiar in every household, so that the young artist could not imagine who he was, or where he belonged—save that he was evidently an Englishman and a gentleman.

Walter could not help wondering at his own singular interest in the haunted fugitive. He had thought of him so often since meeting him so strangely at Rock Land; had wondered greatly at his disappearance in the mysterious yacht; had pondered over his vague communications so long, that he now regarded him with an absorbing interest, not unminged with pitying tenderness.

He watched over him all night as a son might have watched over a sick father, kept the door open, that the cabin air might be cool and fresh, gave him water to drink, and bathed his head and face often; but it became evident to him that with the few and simple appliances at hand he could do nothing to arrest the progress of the terrible fever that was consuming the health and strength of his guest.

"If we were only on our way!" he mused, as the morning beams entered the cabin, causing the dim lantern-light to pale. "A good physician might be able to break up this fever yet. I think I will arouse Jack."

Before doing so he made some coffee for the sailor, and then proceeded with it to the deck. Jack was already at the helm, rubbing his eyes, and looking greatly ashamed for having slept.

"Beg your parding, sir," he said, apologetically. "I was tired 'n I thought so."

"Never mind," responded the artist, kindly. "We must endeavour now to make up for lost time. Drink your coffee and eat some breakfast as quickly as possible. I am in haste to reach London, so that my friend can have medical attendance."

Jack obeyed, producing his breakfast from the forecabin, and then resumed his duties, getting the sloop under way, and declaring that the wind was exactly right for the return voyage.

Walter then returned to the cabin, finding that Lorraine had arisen, and was regarding his patient.

"Mornin', Wal'er," said the owner of the sloop. "This fren' yours is dangerous. He jes' grabbed me by the leg, callin' me vil'nous doctor, and if hadn't got out as I did, dare say he'd killed me. He's little too vilent. How feel bein' up all night?"

"Very well," was the reply. "I am young and vigorous, and do not mind a night's sleeplessness. Your breakfast is ready."

Lorraine eyed the repast discontentedly, glanced at the closet door, then with a sigh of resignation, went on deck to finish his toilet, make his ablutions, and breathe the morning air. He soon returned and took his place at the table with Walter.

When they had finished the meal the artist said—

"Now, father, as our guest seems more quiet, let us have a good talk with each other."

"Var' good!" assented Lorraine.

"I have been thinking during the night," continued Walter, seriously, "how very singular it was that Lord Rosenbury should have made a proposal to you to murder your own son. It seems to me that you should have been the last person in the world to whom he should have applied to execute such a villainous plan. I have come to the conclusion that he has some hold upon you—"

"N, no!" interrupted Lorraine, in alarm. "No such thing, Wal'er! Applied to me because I old tenant—'umble fren' of Rose'by family. There's no secret!"

Walter involuntarily smiled at the weak and silly excuse of his supposed father, and resumed—

"What you have last said confirms my suspicion. Lord Rosenbury has a hold upon you. I have no wish to intrude upon your secrets, nor to force myself into your confidence. If this hold is founded upon money obligations I must beg of you to pay them immediately, and I will give you the money for the purpose!"

"You're too kind, Wal'er," faltered the conscience-stricken Lorraine. "Tain't money. Keep all you've got, an' don't spen' another farthing on me. I don't deserve it. I am a mis'ble worthless villain!"

"Erring you may be, father, but you are not worthless," responded Walter, kindly. "No one can be utterly worthless while they can feel the pangs of repentance—and I am sure you repent of your wrongdoings, don't you, father?"

"I do—I do!" assented Lorraine, with tears. "Oa, if I could do it all over agin! I've done wrong. I ought to be killed. I'd be obliged to you Wal'er, if you'd knock me on the head. I've wronged you ter'ibly, an' can never, never undo it!"

As he concluded the erring man, sobbed bitterly, showing that his remorse was genuine.

Walter took it for granted that the "wrong" alluded to meant the intended desertion on an uninhabited northern island, and replied soothingly—

"I forgive you, father. Although you did very wrongly in consenting to such a wicked scheme, I am convinced you could never have had the heart to execute it. I know you must have some affection for your own and only son!"

"Precious little!" muttered Lorraine, bitterly, under his breath.

"Knowing your peculiar weaknesses," resumed Walter, "I can make more excuses for you than Lord Rosenbury. His guilt, it seems to me, is deeper than yours. I find it hard to believe such wickedness of him," he added, thoughtfully. "With such noble-minded, noble-hearted parents, how can he have become an assassin? And yet I can believe it, too, after his late insults to his mother!"

"Insults—lad'ship!" ejaculated Lorraine. "Is't possible? Way, me's outtin's own throat 'sultin' her? What's he done, Wal'er?"

Walter hesitated about explaining his words for several reasons. He did not wish her ladyship's unhappiness to be made known; he wanted no one to become aware that Rosenbury had failed in deference and respect towards her ladyship; he did not wish to describe a family scene in which he had been a reluctant participant, and, finally, this man was scarcely a desirable confidant, being scarcely yet recovered from the effects of the previous day's unlimited bibulations. All these reasons he explained, but Lorraine begged so earnestly and tearfully for further confidence, that at length Walter yielded to his desire, with the idea that it would put an end to any further intimacy between his lordship and Lorraine.

"How foolish!" groaned Lorraine, when he had concluded. "If he'd only let things alone. If he keeps on he'll work out's own destruction. Wish could drown all thought. Couldn't you give something drink?"

"Now, father," said the artist, kindly, "I feel your troubles all spring from something to drink. Couldn't you get over your weakness, and either be temperate in your use of such things, or, if that is impossible, abstain altogether? I want you to become a man worthy of respect. Won't you try, for my sake?"

Lorraine replied in the affirmative.

Encouraged by his ready acquiescence, Walter set forth the advantages that would accrue to both when Lorraine should become a well conducted member of society, and promise to assist him.

"I feel ag'tated," said Lorraine, after a long conversation. "Think I'll take turn on deck. Better lie down, Wal'er. Shall never forget your kindness—never. Love you better'n all the world."

Lorraine's countenance showed traces of emotion as he proceeded to the deck, and he walked to and fro several times before addressing Jack. At length, he seated himself on a stool near the sailor, saying—

"Mornin', my good fren'. Hope see you 'gath. How's health?"

Jack replied that he was well, and returned the question.

"Not well 'al," was the dejected reply. "Feel mel'choly. No use livin'. 'Bout tired life."

"Sorry, sir, said Jack. "If it's because I flopped off last night, I didn't go for to do it, sir. Sleep took me by surprise. But the Pretty Polly is making up for lost time now, sir."

"The Pretty Polly!" repeated Lorraine, gloomily. "Mas' change name. Bein' nautical man, you might 'sist me to name—sumthin' not gay, you know!"

Jack devoted a little time to cogitation, and announced—

"The Petrel is a nice name, sir, for a little craft like this."

"The Petrel! Var' good. But 'tain't expressive enough. Le's me think. Ah! have it. The 'Moresful Petrel. That's the new name of sloop. I'll have it painted over when get to London. Don't le' me hear any more Polices!"

Jack expressed his admiration of the new title, although not expressly comprehending it, and Lorraine looked gloomily over the side of the sloop as it meditated an immediate descent into the water.

"Better if I was dead!" he muttered. "Life's no charms. Won'er how 't would feel to drown!"

"Don't be having such thoughts, sir," remonstrated Jack. "Cheer up. Take a drop of something, if I might be so bold—"

Lorraine turned round abruptly.

"My fren'," he said, "I'd willin'ly take a drop, on'y my son's busy with sick fren', an's got the key of the closet. Could you," he added, with air of mystery, "lend or sell me a little cheerful drink? P'raps you've got some aboard for yourself. Don't like to 'sturb my son, you know. See here."

He handed Jack a half-sovereign, which that individual very reluctantly refused, saying—

"There's grog aboard, but bought with your money. You'll find it in the fo'c'sle. Being yours, you can help yourself, sir!"

"You're honest fellow!" declared Lorraine, admiringly. "Take th' money as present, my good fren'. If liquor's mine, help yourself's often 's you like!"

Placing the coin in his eager hand, Lorraine made his way to Jack's quarters, found the stores alluded to, and in due time emerged upon the deck, his hat tipped back jauntily, and his face beaming with joviality.

As he resumed his seat beside the sailor Walter came on deck, looked surprised at the change in Lorraine's appearance, which surprise was changed to disappointment, when the owner of the sloop declared—

"No use, Wal'er, try teach old dog new tricks. Stimulants necessary my pecul'ar constitution. So del'cate need strength'nin' bevr'ages. Coffee'll do for women an' babies. Ain't vexed, hops, Wal'er! Don't get vexed! If man 'vented temperance, had known me, made 'ception my favour!"

Walter turned from Lorraine, sick at heart, and glanced over the waters. As he did so, his eyes rested upon a little vessel between the sloop and the shore, and quite near the latter. It was proceeding very slowly, as if

searching for some one supposed to be on the coast. A few minutes' scrutiny showed it to be the mysterious yacht of Rook Land Cove—the very yacht that had carried away the fugitive—and Walter instantly concluded that it was now searching for him.

"They must be terribly in earnest in their design of recapturing the poor gentleman," he thought, "since, in addition to their land-force, they employ the yacht to search for him. It is probable that when they captured him before they did not dare to take him back to his captivity by any other route than water. Some one might have recognised him had he been taken by rail, or he might have convinced some one of his sanity. Evidently, they hope to capture him now, and put him on board the yacht again. I hope the yacht won't speak us!"

He was soon relieved on that point, the strange craft standing in for the shore as it with the idea that the fugitive was within their view, and the sloop speedily increased the distance between them. Walter resolved to take the event as a hint to exercise the most extreme caution in regard to his guest when taking him ashore and afterwards. He was convinced that his patient was an injured gentleman, with a powerful enemy who wished to remove him from his path, and he determined to use every effort to reinstate him in his position.

As he started to return to the cabin Loraine touched him on the arm, and the geniality of his countenance somewhat subdued, remarked,—

"Say you ain't vexed, Wal'er. You're goin' back marry girl an' be happy, so don't lay up wrath 'gainst old father!"

Walter reassured him—speedily restoring his joviality—while at the same time he gave up all hope of changing the nature or habits of his supposed father.

"Here is your key," he said, sadly. "I cannot always play the goaler to a cupboard, so I give up the office now—particularly as you have other supplies. If you will not be a man, I cannot force you to be one."

Loraine received the key with many deprecatory remarks, yet with evident pleasure, and the artist returned to his patient.

The day was passed by the owner of the sloop in cultivating the acquaintance of Jack Marlow, he having discovered him to be a congenial spirit in consequence of his civility of the morning, but he took good care to exact the deference from his seaman which he deemed due to himself as a "shipowner" and person of unlimited means. He told marvellous tales of his wealth, his house in town, his country estates, his rent rolls, &c.—the items all corresponding as nearly as possible with Rosenbury's possessions, to which Loraine felt that he had a sort of claim; and he had the proud satisfaction of feeling that—at least, in the eyes of one individual—he was the greatest man in England.

The day passed less pleasantly to Walter; and yet, perhaps not—for there is always deep pleasure in doing good, in acting the part of the Samaritan to people who have no claim upon us, the pleasure thereby being intensified with a sense of having simply fulfilled a duty.

When night came on, Loraine offered to act as watcher, but he was not exactly in a condition to fulfil the necessary duties with care and thoughtfulness, and his services were declined. He therefore retired at a late hour, and did not awaken until nearly morning, when Jack entered the cabin to announce that the sloop was within a mile of London Bridge.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

'Tis not my talent to conceal my thoughts,
Or carry smiles or sunshine on my face.
When discontent sits heavy at my heart.

—Addison.

The appointment at Lady Rosenbury's, from which Walter Loraine had been so

unavoidably detained, had been faithfully kept by his betrothed. She had proceeded to the trysting place, accompanied by her maid, immediately after dinner, on the evening of her lover's abduction, and had been somewhat surprised to find that he was not awaiting her.

"You find me all alone, my dear," said Lady Rosenbury, with a smile, as she bestowed upon the maiden a motherly greeting. "You look grave because Walter has not yet arrived? I dare say, my dear, that his studio has been crowded with visitors all day, for I have made no secret of my appreciation of his genius, and everyone is eager to see his last picture—mine, you know."

Geraldine assented, and her friend continued,—

"Let us go to the boudoir, my dear. These great drawing-rooms are so dreary in comparison with that cosy retreat."

Her ladyship conducted her guest to the more favoured apartment, which was brilliantly lighted, and presented, with all its elegance, a homelike appearance. The two ladies engaged in conversation, of which Walter was the subject, and awaited his appearance with some impatience.

As they were beginning to indulge in a little unspoken anxiety at his non-appearance Rosenbury entered the room.

His so-called lordship was attired with elaborate care, and seemed to be in fine spirits. There was a triumphant expression on his face, which, a close observer might have noticed, was not unmixed with gloom. In truth, although he was overjoyed at the probable success of his plan in regard to Walter, he had not yet become so hardened as to contemplate his share in the villainous scheme without fear and a twinge of remorse. And yet he felt that if he could undo his part in the transaction and save Walter's life by the simple utterance of one word, he would leave that word unspoken. He believed that his own safety and happiness depended upon the artist's death, and having already so rapidly advanced in the path of crime, he was resolved to proceed still further, and make himself perfectly secure in his false position.

He had suspected the lover's appointment for that evening in consequence of Lady Rosenbury having declined an invitation out, and he determined to take Walter's place, and render himself as agreeable as possible to the maiden.

It was with this view he had now entered her presence.

(To be continued.)

A GREAT COST.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"LONDON is the best place, in fact, the only one," Dr. Murray had declared to Lady Bridgeworth, as he urged upon her the advisability of getting both the convalescents away from Northshire. "Brackenbury is too bleak for Miss Lascelles, and he will be certainly better in town. Life needs life, you know!"

"Always wise!" Josephine said, with her most brilliant smile.

Inwardly, this arrangement was not at all pleasing to her. She desired to go direct to Brackenbury Court. There were so many dangers to be feared in London.

"And you, Lady Bridgeworth, I suppose you will make the best of your way south?" Dr. Murray said, with some solicitude. He honestly and sincerely admired Josephine. Her character and nature appealed to him distinctly. "You are looking a little worn—a not unnatural thing when one remembers your long and close confinement to the sick room!"

"I am very well!" Lady Bridgeworth

answered—but not truthfully, for, indeed, she was far from well. The strain of constant watching, the perpetual apprehensiveness, was telling on her nervous system. "A few weeks in the Riviera, however, will not come amiss!" she finished.

She had not the smallest intention of going to the Riviera, or indeed, anywhere farther than a few moments' distance from Humphrey Lascelles and his sister.

She had had a terrible *quart d'heure* in the last twenty-four hours—ever since she had learnt from Muriel's lips that a letter had been written to Owen Griffiths.

She had not closed her eyes all the night, and was up at an unearthly hour the next morning. Once again it was her task to have to intercept the letters ere they could reach their proper destination.

She loathed herself while she prepared for this disagreeable duty. She had no difficulty in making an excuse to carry out her plans.

"I have a headache," she said, languidly, to Finn, when she arrived with an early cup of tea. "I think I must go out, I feel stifled. Surely it must be very hot this morning, Finn?"

Finn had no occasion to complain of the heat; but she looked at her mistress with a certain degree of commiseration. Never, since she had been with Lady Bridgeworth, had she seen her so faded and ill-looking, quite "hagged," to use her own expression.

"Will you walk before breakfast, my lady?" she asked, as she moved about the room in her softest manner.

"No; I will drive into—," Lady Bridgeworth said; and forthwith Finn went down to order the cart or carriage, or whatever it was called, to be in readiness in half-an-hour.

They had had to send in for their letters lately, through the illness of the old postman.

Muriel was delighted at the thought that her friend was going to have fresh air.

"Bring back a colour, dear Seraphim!" she said, affectionately. "Ah! wait till you get back to Torchester, and sit behind those beautiful little rascols Peter and Paul—that will be real driving!"

Josephine smiled, and hurried away.

The drive to the railway station was not a pleasant one, and she shivered now and again in the damp morning air.

She got down and made a pretence of sending a telegram for Dawson's benefit, and then the letters were handed to her.

In a moment she saw that Owen Griffiths' curious crabbed, clerical handwriting was not among them.

She turned paler.

"Of course," she said to herself, "he will come. He will be glad of the chance of seeing her. I should have thought of that. I—"

She trembled in every limb, yet what could she have done? After all, had she known for certain he was coming, but she knew nothing, absolutely nothing.

She turned the letters over again mechanically. Then her heart gave a leap. No, Owen had not written; but his mother had. She caught sight of the Torchester postmark? Was it to say Owen had already started? She scarcely knew how she got home, and to her own room again.

Muriel's face had grown very white with disappointment when she found no letter from her friend.

"He must be away," she said, with conviction. It was not possible for Owen Griffiths to fail her, or, indeed, anyone.

Josephine found the girl's thought was correct. She opened Mrs. Griffiths' letter over some hot water in the safe seclusion of her own room, and skimmed through it hurriedly.

Mrs. Griffiths wrote most affectionately. She said she must plead guilty to having opened Muriel's letter to her son; but in his absence to Yorkshire for a week she had been commissioned by him to read all his correspondence, and she showed her genuine pleasure at once again communicating with Muriel in every word.

She touched on the question of Barbara very largely; and, in fact, the letter was absolutely dangerous to Josephine's plans in every way, for so much was said of Lady Castleton and her extraordinary discommodities concerning her grandchild, so much sympathy was expressed, most delicately, indeed, for Sir Humphrey, in his present position, that Lady Bridgeworth knew that Mariel would be fired into action as she read, and she could not foresee the immediate result. She calmly and deliberately consigned Mrs. Griffiths' letter to the fire.

There was no hurry for a few hours. Mariel was prepared for to-day; by the end of the week they would be all en route for Brackenburg.

She would manage to have some Torchester news between this and then, and she would let Mariel know that Owen Griffiths and his mother were away from the Vicarage, and then—well, then it would possibly be a long time before Owen Griffiths would meet the Lascelles.

Mariel would be sure not to write again when she received no answer to her letter. For all her gentleness and sweetness she was possessed of an enormous degree of pride; and even should there be an explanation when she did meet the young clergyman, well, it would be very easy to imagine that his mother's reply had been lost in some way. By that time, too, explanations need not be feared, perhaps.

Josephine did not intend to have any diffidence. Once the train was set in motion she should hurry everything on as fast as possible, which, being clearly translated, meant that she intended to marry Humphrey Lascelles before many weeks had gone.

She had a sort of blind reliance on herself, a dogged belief that this success must come. It could not be possible to have done so much, to have sunk so low, to have degraded herself to such an appalling level, and all from failure.

Josephine lived only for the day that should see her Humphrey Lascelles' wife. She had made no plans; she had no future, she was prepared for no possibility beyond this.

She gave a little shudder as she took up a letter from Julian Lascelles. She was thankful now she had gone for the morning post. She had no desire that Mariel or Humphrey should know how intimate she and Julian had become.

She never despised herself so much as when this fact was brought home to her, as it was this morning.

Julian wrote one of his frothy, pleasing letters, containing many fine phrases, which sounded very poetical to the uninitiated. He wrote on the thickest paper, with a studied carelessness of writing, which was all hateful to Lady Bridgeworth; but what was most hateful of all was the calm, cool, almost insolent hint that henceforth their interests were mutual, and their prospects one.

"He is a worm that will need crushing," Josephine said to herself, her hand clenching passionately over the thick paper. "When—when I am Humphrey's wife I will set my heel upon him. He shall never have cause to say I am afraid of him!"

And then she had given herself up to arranging the journey to Brackenburg, and then Dr. Murray had arrived for his final visit, and had insisted on going to London, and when Dr. Murray had put forward such a plea as Mariel's delicacy as the strongest factor in his insistence, then Josephine knew that she might as well try to move a rock as attempt to dissuade Humphrey from following up this advice.

Her intercourse with Humphrey was exceedingly pleasant at times. He was so full of gratitude, so tenderly solicitous for her, so handsome and gentle even in his gait, weakened state, that Josephine loved him with greater and deeper intensity day after day, hour after hour.

The subject of Barbara was dead between them; her name was never mentioned. Sometimes Josephine felt a yearning to know what thoughts were lodged in his breast and brain,

as he sat leaning back in his chair, his face pale and set, his lips compressed. Once she spoke to Mariel on his silence. It was the day before they left for London.

"It only he would speak," she said, hurriedly. "It is bad for him to brood. You say he does not understand all that has happened, Mariel, and yet—"

Mariel answered in a low voice,—"He knows all. He understands all! I have given him Lady Castleton's letter!"

"And?" Josephine could scarcely breathe, "he will do nothing, say nothing!"

"He will do nothing, say nothing! He—he says there is nothing to do—nothing to say!"

"He permits such indigence—such impertinence, Josephine cried, her voice trembling, as Mariel imagined, from indignation. She paused a moment. "Surely that is unlike him, Mariel?"

"He is unlike himself altogether," the girl answered, her tears flowing fast. "He—he seems to have been struck a great blow. I don't think he would have heeded Lady Castleton's letter; but it is the fact of Barbara's strange, cruel, silence. The knowledge of her relationship with Lady Castleton, and the curious change that has come over her with that relationship, that has seemed to go straight home to his heart, and carry conviction to him that all is over! Oh! I am so troubled about him. You don't know Humphie, I do. He will say nothing, but he will never be the same again! Never, never, my dear, dear Humphie, my dear brother!"

And then Mariel had broken down utterly, and had wept bitterly, and Josephine stood by biting her lips in the tempestuous anger and impatience that came over her. It was torture to her jealous heart to hear such words as those.

"You think he cared so much?" she said, after a while, in a low voice.

Mariel dried her eyes.

"He loves her with the whole strength of his life! He will always love her. Baby was more to him than anything in the world. More than his life. More than me!"

There was a not unnatural touch of bitterness in the last words. They had been so much to one another, Humphie and she, and now—

She had never given Barbara a single jealous thought. All through the time when Humphrey had asked her to give the lovely, lonely young creature a portion of the affection she bestowed on him she had fallen in love with Barbara. Her heart was full of pity for this wail and wail, with her wondrous beauty, and sweet, pure face. She had been so overcome with admiration, with sincere liking, and with joy in Humphie's joy, that there had been no room for jealousy. And the more she had known of Barbara, the more she had loved the girl who was to be her beloved brother's wife. She had never stopped to heed or to object to all the many things she might have very naturally objected to in this engagement. It was enough for her that Humphie was happy, as he had never been before—enough for her that Barbara was bewitching, with a loveliness that surpassed all beauty she had ever seen or dreamed of; and Owen Griffiths' staunch and firm friendship for Barbara had enhanced her charm tenfold in Mariel's eyes.

But now against herself, as it were, everything was changed to Mariel, and the feelings that had never come before came now. She was hurt, disappointed, miserable, almost distracted, on Humphie's account—disappointed, not only in Barbara, Owen Griffiths' strange silence was all part of the new and painful feelings, Josephine had not calculated on Mariel's pride in vain. When the days passed, and no answer came to her from Owen, Mariel only seemed to grow paler and quieter, but she made no effort to write a second letter.

Lady Bridgeworth watched her as a cat watches a mouse, but she felt, despite this,

that she need not fear; for even were Mariel to write she could find some means of preventing the communication from reaching its destination, just as she had intercepted Mrs. Griffiths' letter to Mariel.

There was no occasion, however, for any further strategy on this point. No further news came from the Torchester Rectory, and Mariel made no further attempt to enlist Owen Griffiths' aid; and so the hours wore away until the moment arrived for the journey to London.

Josephine was to travel with the invalids up to town. Then they were to part—she to go to her large, gloomy house, the Lascelles to take up their abode temporarily at a hotel, where they usually stayed when in London.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LADY BRIDGEWORTH was exceedingly annoyed and irritated on the evening of her arrival in town to find a note awaiting her from Julian Lascelles, in which he announced his intention of calling on her early the next morning.

She was at a loss to understand how Julian had become aware that she was returning to London. She supposed he must have heard it through Mariel in some way. She was in no mood to meet her collaborator in wrongdoing. She loathed, she detested Julian. She was nervous, apprehensive, eager, full of fears and hopes. She no longer needed either Julian's aid or that of any other person. She could act alone now, and much better so. Her present mood destroyed her usual caution. She was reckless in her anger and dislike for him.

She was not strictly just to him, for Julian was not wholly to blame for all that had happened, and, in fact, it had lain in her own hands to work with him, or by herself. Tired with the journey, irritated and worn out by perpetual thinking and planning, she acted without her customary prudence. She scribbled a few curt words to Julian, telling him it was not possible to see him, as he suggested, and hinting that in all probability she should leave town immediately.

"What have I to fear from him!" she said to herself, with a sneer. "After all, he cannot, for his own sake, speak of my share in this business, for he incriminates himself by so doing; and, once and for all, I do not intend to let him imagine he can do what he likes with me. If he expects to reap any golden reward for the aid he has given me he is vastly mistaken. He has got the revenge he so desired on the brother he hated—he must be content."

Her night was a strangely troubled one. She sat by the fire and shivered in her lonely room, long after Fian had left her. She was cold, tired, and almost ill with her mental and bodily exertion, but she could not rest. Barbara's girlish figure came back to haunt her. She went over and over again in her mind that night when she had stood there reading the letter her own hand had penned, giving deliberate utterance to every word that went into deadly surety of aim to the girl's stricken heart.

"It was a cowardly thing," she said to herself, "a coward's trick," and a mighty shame came over her. The old, strong, pure nature that had been the chief characteristic of Josephine Newton in her younger days seemed to burst through the coat of malice, jealousy, petty meanness and spite that she had garbed herself in of late. The hardness melted out of her heart; and as she sat there in her dressing-gown, her hair falling loose on her shoulders, she found the glow of the fire fade into a blurred mist, and tears rolled down her pale face, and fell through her fingers on to her knees.

What had come to her to-night? Why should she have suddenly faltered in her evil path, and grown weary and sickened of her treachery? Josephine could never tell. She was no romantic girl, no sentimental creature

made up of sudden impulses, some for good, and some for bad. It was her own innate honesty that spoke out at last, and turning upon her denounced her to herself in no small terms of disgust and contempt. She tried to fight against this tide of feeling.

"He ruined me, he broke my heart. It is only right I should be avenged!" she muttered to herself one moment. And then the next, "Avenged on her for him! Oh! it is cruel, it is unjust. She knew nothing; she was a baby in those old foolish days—those old, sweet days, when the world was like Heaven because Cyril loved me. Yes, yes, it is cruel, it is unjust, it is a sin!" and the colour flamed into the pale cheeks at the vehemence of her thoughts. "I have been mad!" she said suddenly to herself, "mad!"

She could sit no longer. She got up and walked to and fro. A church clock somewhere near was chiming the hour of two. How long had she sat there?

She had lost all head of time—she had lost all remembrance of later things—the keenness of her desire—her newly-acquired detective habits—her furious jealousy.

Somehow, they had fallen away from her. She was back in the past. She was plain Josephine Newton, looking into Cyril Vereker's handsome, passionate eyes, and listening to his words of hope and love as they walked together under the lime trees.

How vividly the past came back! All its hopes, its throbbing hopes of a future, when she would be free of the wretched surroundings she had to call home—free to go out into the world, with Cyril as her husband and Babs as her baby sister, to guard and watch over her as though she were her own child.

Well, it had been a time full of sweetness. Even now she could feel a touch of the old thrill. She could feel herself swayed by that strong influence which all intercourse with handsome ne'er-do-well thriftless Cyril always brought her.

She seemed to be living that old time again, fighting his battles, pouring out the energy, the strong, manly qualities of her own nature upon him, hopeful to spur him on to rise as he should rise, as he must rise.

She felt once again all the old antagonism spring up as her aunt's spiteful tirades against Cyril came back, all the old loyalty and faith in the man she loved, despite the cruel mocking words that told her a dozen times a day that she would wake up some fine morning and find her handsome, lookless lover, flown away and for ever!

Josephine had only smiled at these words. In this present sympathy with the past she felt she should have smiled again had they been spoken now.

She was strong in her faith—her pride for her lover was not greater than the pride for herself; and when the blow fell, and she learnt from an outside source that Cyril had gone suddenly from the village-town—gone without even a farewell word—gone with sunny-haired Babs—gone, as gossip said, in the train of the handsome circus rider, who had turned the country heads for a month past.

It was this pride that sustained her against all the years she had to endure, that gave her strength to go about her miserable daily life, and live on with her broken heart until fate and fortune threw Sir Charles Bridgeworth in her path, and her troubles were ended—all save one—in prosperity.

Josephine had nursed her wrong against Cyril Vereker, as we have seen, until it grew as a very canker in her life. All that was hard and cold and bitter in her nature blossomed into being under this sorrow.

It was her pride, too, that had suffered—pride that she should have accepted as real what Cyril had only meant as play—horrible mortification of a proud spirit, that she should have given her whole woman's heart only to have it kicked away lightly when the game was over, and the player grown tired of it.

She understood all the motives that had actuated her with regard to Barbara; but

somehow to-night she could not say to herself she had done well. Had she not sunk to the very level that had roused all her contempt for Cyril?

Was not her conduct even more despicable, more cruel, more wantonly destructive than his had been? And yet it was this very conduct of his that had demanded such virulent revenge!

Josephine gave two long shuddering sighs. The fatality, the incomprehensiveness of life came to her in those silent night hours with an almost overwhelming force.

She was weary all of a sudden—wearied of her ambitions—wearied of her bitterness—of her revenge—of her desires!

Humphrey Lascelles seemed to fade into the distance. The atmosphere that hung about him seemed charged with all that was painful and disagreeable.

The hopes of a future that had come to her last year in connection with this young man had been pleasant and simple enough.

There had been no feverish desire, no eagerness, no passionate intensity then. She had liked him with a sincere liking. She had called this liking love, and she had encouraged it until it had taken a more decided and vigorous form; but to-night Josephine was true to herself. There was no longer any sham or any medium between herself and what lay in her heart; and she knew by this crucial light that the feeling she had for Humphrey Lascelles was no deeper than it had ever been, and that the real actual motive in all her miserable dealings of late had been bitter revenge for a wrong done to her, and a jealousy that had had its birth years before, when Cyril had lavished on Barbara the love and tenderness for which she craved so much.

She had torn open the rusty locks that had barred her real heart and conscience from her gaze, and stood now looking down on the truth, and realising with a dull sense of miserable shame that she had sunk to utter degradation for no end save her own lasting self-condemnation.

It came to her all at once the knowledge that this was the end—the end in more senses than one. To-night's vigil had solved the problem so far.

As she had struggled, and planned, and sinned, with all the force, all the strength and purpose of her strong nature, so now she shrank from grasping the prize for which she had lost so much.

It was the end! She paced slowly to and fro, the weariness in her brain and limbs making her feel cold and sick, with the dull, dead ache that spread all over her.

It was the end! She was tired; her strength, her energy, was spent; her jealousy had faded into nothingness, her revenge was dead.

She was so near the goal—yes, she knew it. She had schemed, she had worked so well, so carefully; only another few weeks' more thought and worry, only another few more weeks of care, watching, and anxiety, and then!

Josephine shuddered, and her haggard face grew more wan and worn. She sank into the chair again, and put her chilled feet to the fire. The goal was in sight, she could almost reach it, but the cost was too great.

She knew now, in this moment of self-communion, that were she to become Humphrey Lascelles' wife to-morrow she would never know the meaning of the word satisfaction in such a marriage.

Happiness was something she never expected. A vision of what her daily life would be under such circumstances rose before her, only to make her shudder again.

How could she have ever so forgotten her pride as to imagine a future in which she would receive a friendly tolerance, and a friend's affection in return for her whole devotion. Was she the woman to be satisfied with this?

See, knew she was not. Humphrey was not a weathercock, to be blown hither and thither with each wind that came.

The love he had given so freely, so spontaneously to Barbara Vereker would never be given to another woman.

Josephine knew that he liked her, respected her, esteemed her; but when the truth came to him, when he learnt her treachery—as he would do sooner or later—what of the future then? Would he not turn and curse her as the destroyer of his life's happiness?

Probably, and very naturally so, this train of thought came fundamentally from the reaction of mind and body following on a long period of anxiety and attendance in the sick room; but whether this were really the case or no, the thoughts had come, and Josephine was checked suddenly and surely in the path she had trodden lately with such sad and disastrous results.

The night wore itself away slowly, and morning came at last, to find the woman's form sunk in the chair by the grey dead fire. She had lived through a small agony of shame, and as she dragged herself to her feet and staggered to her bed, not to rest, but to save herself from her maid's inquisitive eyes, Josephine Bridgeworth had determined on her immediate course of action—one in which she would need no collaborator, and the after effects of which might be some antidote to the miserable shame and proud humiliation she was now enduring through her own wrongdoing.

Lord Castleton paid his visit to Tantz, and gave his order in his own particular fashion about the alteration in his new breeches. Then he went to Tattersall's, and then he went in search of Barbara's dog.

He was glad of something to do, poor boy! It prevented him from thinking. Thought, at least, heavy, serious, and sad thought was a new experience for him. He tried to escape from it by action, only to find, as all the world find, that trouble is the most faithful, the most constant companion in the wide world.

It never lags behind, it never forgets; it is always there, silent and unobtrusive. Walking, driving, riding, waking, or sleeping its fidelity never fails; its grey, shadowy presence is endowed with invisibility, to be sure, but it is there, nevertheless.

The choice of the dog was the most pleasing errand; for, somehow, it was not possible to be enthusiastic over his breeches to-day, and Blair's hunter had been a very ragged sort of animal, after all his exertions to see it; but the dog was for Barbara. That was quite a different sort of thing.

They had talked the matter of this dog over so much together he seemed to feel as though she were with him in actual body as well as spirit when he went through the important task of choosing her a pet.

He had said nothing to her as to what he should do in that other great matter; but her beautiful eyes had held his for a moment when he knocked at her door and bade her a brief farewell, and he knew that she must be enduring a small agony of mind until she saw or heard from him again.

It hastened him to be up and doing, and yet he shrank in his keen pain from his self-allotted duty.

It was so hard to have to give her up just when he had found her, and he had loved her so much he had never known what it was to live until he had met Babs—lovely—lovely Babs—with her sweet, sad lips, and those glorious eyes!

How red her hair had shone in the soft light as she sat in the conservatory two nights ago—red, and yet golden! He had never seen anything so beautiful, not in pictures nor in dreams; indeed, as he confessed to himself, he had never known what it was to dream before Babs came into his life.

He had lived such a simple existence, such a stupid one, he said to himself, yet that simple, stupid existence had spelt more happiness than he was ever likely to know again.

He gave orders to have the dog sent to his



JOSEPHINE OPENED MRS GRIFFITHS' LETTER OVER SOME HOT WATER IN THE SECLUSION OF HER OWN ROOM!

chambers, and then he took a hansom and drove to clubland, there to commence his inquiries for Humphrey Lascelles.

He was sitting looking strangely moody and grave, for his face was, as a rule, as sunny as a summer's day, when he caught sight of Julian Lascelles.

In an instant he had stopped his cab with an energetic "by Jove," and had run along to the brougham, from which Julian had just alighted.

"How sallow and sickly the fellow looks!" was his muttered thought, and, indeed, Julian justified this harsh criticism.

He was muffled up in a huge coat with an enormous fur collar, and he looked pinched with the cold, and with a most evident bad temper.

He was, indeed, furious. He had sworn a few unintelligible oaths when Lady Bridgeworth's letter had reached him in the morning; and then he had broken through his steadfast rule, and had gone out at what he called an unearthly hour to insist upon seeing Josephine before she should have carried out her project of leaving London again immediately.

That she should have dared to set his connection thus easily on one side was as objectionable as it was incomprehensible. He had not imagined any woman could have shown such courage.

"She is tired, and has forgotten her wisdom!" he had said when he read her letter, but he had not said this when he reached her door, and had to turn back without being admitted.

The anger he felt made him furious. He had reckoned on Josephine as men reckon on a sure and steady fortune, and this strange move on her part left him unprepared for the moment how to set next.

He did not wish to say anything definite to incriminate her if there was any chance left of obtaining the golden advantages he had taught himself to expect; but nature is

stronger than avarice sometimes, and when Julian turned peevishly to confront Lord Castleton a sudden flash of peevish malice came into his apology of a heart.

"I will teach you to set me at defiance, my lady!" he said to himself, cunningly, and as fate would have it Lord Castleton's first words led directly to what he had in his mind.

"Can you give me your brother's address, Lascelles?" Bertie asked, rushing headlong into his business without letting a remembrance arise to hinder him. "I—I want him particularly—immediately, if possible."

Julian looked at the handsome young face before him with half a smile. He guessed at something of the truth, as he read the change in the Earl's appearance.

"Sorry I cannot oblige you, Castleton. My brother," with the snarl that always accompanied any mention of Humphrey's name, "and I are not good correspondents; but," his sallow face taking a touch of colour as he thought of Josephine's discomfiture, "I think I can put you in the direct way of obtaining what you want. Lady Bridgeworth is in town, *en passant*, I believe, and she and my sister are inseparable, you know. Why not go to her?"

Lord Castleton paused only a moment, then he said, quietly,—

"Thanks. I think I will! Fine morning, isn't it?"

"Fine! I think it damnable!" Julian answered, curtly, and with that the two men parted, and Bertie rattled away to the big house where he had first met Babs, and where, all unconsciously, those bright, beautiful hopes had been breathed into life only to die after so short a span of existence.

The butler informed the early visitor that her ladyship was at home, but indisposed, and could see no one. Then, as Lord Castleton handed his card, he spoke, involuntarily,—

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but I have this moment despatched a telegram from her

ladyship to your lordship, asking you to call, if you were in town, as soon as was convenient to yourself. May I make so bold at—"

"I have received no telegram!" Lord Castleton said, looking, as he felt, surprised. "I left my rooms very early. How strange I should have called! Fortune, too, as it turns out. You had better take my card up to Lady Bridgeworth. If it is too early to see me I can call again, or I don't mind waiting, whichever Lady Bridgeworth prefers."

Lady Bridgeworth's reply was a desire that Lord Castleton would very kindly wait, as she wished to see him most particularly. So Bertie mounted to the sombre, big drawing-room, cheerless in the winter morning gloom, and dark as only an old London house seems to be.

To him, dark and dreary though it was, it had a sweetness, an attraction for him. He seemed to see Babs' lovely face and form gleaming out vividly in the dusky corners. He remembered, as clearly as though it had been yesterday, the first moment he had seen her, and how they had been drawn to one another almost immediately in that meeting. There was a smile on his lips, and yet a mist before his eyes, as he stood there alone; but the smile went as the door opened, and Lady Bridgeworth came into the room.

He was not very clever, this kind-hearted young man, but he seemed to feel all at once that he was face to face with the solution of a problem that would bring back her lost happiness to Barbara, and seal his own hopelessness at one and the same time.

(To be continued.)

EMIGRATING to South America will find seven species of poisonous-serpents, thirteen insects which sting or bite, eight plants which poison, and 205 animals, birds and insects which indulge in night serenades and help a tired man secure eight hours' sleep.



THE PONIES STOPPED, AND MRS. ARDLEY BEGGED BETTY TO ACCEPT A SEAT IN HER CARRIAGE!

NOVELETTE.]

BETTY'S CHANCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE REV. WILLIAM LESTER came of an old family, and took a good degree at college, which facts, combined, perhaps, with the lesser one that he was really an earnest, upright man, caused him to receive promotion early in life; and while many of his contemporaries in holy orders were still struggling curates, he was appointed, at the early age of twenty-nine, to the Rectory of Appleton-cum-Littleby; both parishes being situated in a rural part of Sussex.

It is true that the joint benefices were only worth something under three hundred a-year, and that the peculiar situation of Littleby made it indispensable that it should have a curate to itself.

Still Mr. Lester was young and hopeful. Other preferment he argued, poor man, would certainly follow this first living; and so in fancy he saw himself a dean, or at the very least an archdeacon; and on the strength of his brilliant future he took unto himself a wife, who believed as fully in his prospects as himself, and brought up her children to do so too.

Alas! for their bright dreams! Five-and-twenty years went by, and Mr. Lester was still the Rector of Appleton, and likely to remain so.

Littleby had, however, passed out of his charge. The hamlet grew to a village, the village to a thriving seaside town.

The inhabitants began to look down on Appleton, and wish to become a separate parish, under a vicar of their own.

Mr. Lester had an energetic curate, who collected contributions for the church restoration and enlargement.

Finally a wealthy layman, whose only child

had been cured of incipient consumption by the mild air of Littleby, came forward and offered twenty thousand pounds towards the scheme provided the district was finally separated from Appleton, and placed under a vicar of its own.

The Bishop was appealed to, and diverted eighty pounds from the Rector of Appleton's meagre stipend towards that of the future vicar of Littleby.

The layman's gift was divided in two—half restoring and beautifying the church, half being invested towards the endowment.

All this time Mr. Lester never doubted that he should be Vicar of Littleby. The income would be six hundred a-year at once, and probably increase largely in the future, as the endowment was invested in freehold property, and land became more and more valuable every year in the growing watering-place. But, alas! the new inhabitants of Littleby had far different ideas.

The wealthy layman had, from the first, made it a condition of his generosity that Mr. Ardley, the eloquent curate, should be the first vicar.

The circumstances were explained frankly to Mr. Lester. The people of Littleby did not want him, and they did want Mr. Ardley.

The latter was engaged to the daughter of Mr. Clayton, the millionaire. When he married her, all the Clayton wealth and influence would be at his disposal.

He could build schools, start clubs, provide all sorts of benevolent enterprises.

If Mr. Lester forced himself on an unwilling flock they would shut their purses; dissent would flourish. The church would be handicapped in that particular spot for years.

He was a good man, and he gave in. He was fifty, turned. The best years of his life had been spent there, and yet no one wanted him.

From that moment the Rev. William Lester ceased to hope for worldly prosperity. He resigned himself to be poor all his days.

It was hard lines—very! When the eighty pounds for Littleby had been deducted in the present depreciation of tithes, Mr. Lester could only count on a hundred and fifty pounds a-year to keep himself, his wife, and seven children, besides meeting those parish expenses which must devolve on the parson if there are no resident gentry.

There were no rich people in Appleton. The moment anyone got a little better off he migrated to Littleby.

There was no society at all in the older parish, and the Rector's seven daughters thought of Littleby with a kind of girlish longing, when they heard of the concerts at the new pier, the carpet dances, the kettle-drums, and flower-shows.

The three elder ones had been old enough at the time Littleby was separated to understand the injustice done their father.

They were good girls, and kind-hearted ones; but there were just a few people they could not feel in charity with, to wit Lucius Ardley and his wife, and the lady's father, Mr. Clayton, the millionaire. These three had brought shipwreck on the Lesters' dearest hopes. The Rector might forgive for himself, but his wife and elder girls could never forgive for him.

There were seven of them. No boy had ever come to gladden the hearts of the Rector and his wife.

They had been married thirty years now, and no doubt, if things had gone more prosperously with them, by this time some of their girls would have gone to gladden other homes; but since the "children" grew up Mr. and Mrs. Lester had never been rich enough to go into society.

From year's end to year's end no stranger crossed the threshold of their ivy-covered Rectory. The daughters never left home on visits.

They had not only never received an offer of marriage, but for a long time past they had not met a single marriageable man.

In old times, before Littleby was "sepa-

rated," Mrs. Lester had had a dream of her own. She had always hoped the Rev. Lucius Ardley would marry her eldest girl.

When he came to be her father's curate, a shy young deacon of twenty-four, Phyllis had been seventeen, a pretty, blooming creature, with a wise head on her graceful shoulders. She had "looked after" the poor women of Littleby as well as those of Appleton.

She and Mr. Ardley had gone hand in hand in all good works, and to her mother it seemed a foregone conclusion that when the parishes were divided, and they removed to Littleby, Phyllis and Mr. Ardley would be married, and live on in the old Rectory at Appleton.

The overthrow of this hope staggered her almost as much as the loss of Littleby Vicarage. Reproved by her husband for her bitter denunciation of the Rev. Lucius as a "base deceiver," Mrs. Lester had to confess he had never "said" anything definite; but for all that she maintained he would have married Phyllis but for the appearance on the scene of Beatrice Clayton and her wealth.

And this was the only chance, if it could be called one, of matrimony that had ever come nigh the Rectory girls, and as the years passed on, and her twenty-ninth birthday stared Phyllis in the face, poor Mrs. Lester resigned herself to the fact that her first-born would probably be an old maid!

But the others! Surely her six sisters might be more fortunate than Phyllis! Poor Mrs. Lester thought about it till her head ached, and she grew almost fractious. Her husband was getting old. His income died with him. What was to become of the girls?

They were discussing something of the sort themselves one June afternoon in the beautiful shady garden they loved so well. Not their father's death—he was far too dear to them for them to speculate on that. Not their chances matrimonial, for they were simple, innocent girls, and not the style to go husband-hunting, even if they had known how to set about it. No, it was only the one pressing question of ways and means which formed the thread of their consultation.

"We really must do something," said Vera, the second sister, who was great at figures. "We are getting poorer and poorer every year. I think before the children come home in August some of us elder ones ought to turn out into the world!"

The "children" were Daisy and Sophy, aged respectively sixteen and fourteen. They were pupils at a cheap London school, where, in consideration of innumerable small services, they were boarded and taught accomplishments for the moderate annual premium of twelve guineas.

"But what are we to do?" demanded Gladys, the beauty of the family, who at five-and-twenty was really the most helpless of the seven sisters. "You are too terribly vague, Vera."

"Vera would like us to be professors of cookery or lady doctors!" said Monica, with the cutting sarcasm of eighteen. "She forgets that all such things cost money for the start! We have had no training, and we don't possess a penny of capital. We might be described like the London dockers, as 'unhilled labourers!'"

"Only we don't labour at all," put in a girl who had not yet spoken, the middle one of the seven sisters, and one who had seemed a kind of alien from her cradle.

The three elder girls were devoted to each other. Monica made common cause with the "children" in all things. Betty had no pair, no friend. Her very birth had caused commotion in the household, and perhaps she had never been quite forgiven.

Everyone believed when Gladys was six years old, and still undisturbed in her title of "Baby," that she would be the youngest of the Rector's children, when just before her seventh birthday preparations had to be made for another arrival.

Mrs. Lester fondly hoped that the spell was broken, and she should have a son. Alas!

Betty was not only the "wrong sort," she was the ugliest, most wizened specimen of babyhood ever seen, and her mother's health was in such a state that Mr. Lester accepted the offer of his sister to take charge of the ailing little mortal, and for seven long years Betty grew up in her aunt's house.

She might have been there now, but Dr. Carlton conceived a strong desire to travel, and went out to seek his fortune in Australia.

A childless couple, with a modest provision for old age, they were perfectly free to adopt a roaming life if it suited them.

Aunt Elizabeth would gladly have taken her little niece, but the Rector refused on conscientious scruples. No child of his should go where she might be fifty miles or so from a church.

The Carltons were offended at the abrupt recall of the little maiden they had cherished so tenderly. Mr. and Mrs. Lester were still more offended when, on the child's arrival at the Rectory, she fretted incessantly for her aunt.

Betty had never been away since, even for a single night. She loved the dear old Rectory quite as much as her sisters, but she always felt alone. She never seemed to belong to the graceful, fair-haired girls who were such contrasts to herself.

Mrs. Lester had been a pretty blonde, and all her daughters except Betty took after her, and had blue eyes and hair of varied shades of flaxen.

They were all very much alike. Phyllis had a sad, worn aspect, as though life had gone edgeways with her. Vera was more energetic, only unfortunately she was not practical. Gladys did nothing but look charming. She believed firmly in her own attractions, and probably snubbed Betty so systematically because it annoyed her to remember that she was almost seven years older than this dark-eyed girl, who certainly looked every bit of her age. What was the use of Gladys being able to "pass for twenty" any day if Betty looked rather more than nineteen, and everyone knew there were over six years between them?

Betty was small and trimly made. Everything she wore seemed part of herself. She had brown hair of a bright chestnut tint, and her large, velvety brown eyes were full of expression; they were shadowed by long, black lashes, and her brows were black too. She was too pale for beauty, but it was a very sweet face, and she did not at all deserve her sister's favourite description, "an ugly little brown thing!"

The speech gave great offence to the group under the mulberry tree, for it was the favourite belief of the Miss Lesters that they worked very hard indeed.

"Speak for yourself, please, Betty," said Monica, sharply. "I'm sure I've practised three hours and spent two over my drawing every day this week."

"And I have been toiling over the parish accounts for weeks," said Gladys, "while everyone knows Phyllis is father's right-hand. The parish could never get on without her."

Betty sighed. She was dressed in a plain grey serge, with a cherry-coloured ribbon at her throat. Her sisters wore white. They declared washing dresses were the only things bearable in summer, and cost next to nothing—never counting the soap and fuel, not to mention the trial of the servant's time and temper used to bring their snowy frills to a correct state of perfection.

"I daresay," observed Phyllis, gently—she was always gentle, poor girl—"we might do a great deal more, only there never seems much that can be done without money!"

"Vera said we ought to make a start before the children come home," replied Monica. "It would have been more to the purpose, Vera, if you had said what we were to do!"

"I am sure mother would never consent," put in Phyllis gravely, "nor father either."

"Yes, they would," said Betty, decidedly. "The time will be less than ever this year. I

heard father say last night things were getting desperate. I don't think they would like to tell us we must turn out into the world, but if we proposed it ourselves it would be a relief to them."

"I don't believe it," said Gladys, flatly. "With my delicate health, no one could expect such a sacrifice of me!"

"I would go to-morrow," said Phyllis, bravely, "only there seems no opening. We can't afford to spend money on advertisements; and, besides, if it came to the point, I don't think we could describe ourselves as very useful or accomplished?"

"You must stay at home," said Vera, decidedly. "You are father's right hand. I suppose, too, Gladys is not strong enough to rough it; but anyone of us others would do."

A grave look of apprehension stole across Monica's face. Home might be poor, but it was happy. Bave for three years at the very school where the "children" were now she had never been away; and school had been gall and wormwood to her, for the girls were not ladies; and though the instruction was good, and the diet plentiful, the career of the pupil-teacher was so full of alights and humiliations that she was thankful to turn her back on it all.

"Suppose we draw lots?" said Betty, cheerfully. "It seems no use to speculate on what we can do, until we know who is to be the one to do it."

"Betty, I believe you are perfectly heartless," said Gladys, severely. "Fancy making a mockery of such a solemn subject!"

"It's better to laugh than to cry," persisted Betty. "Of course we might give way and make ourselves miserable, but it wouldn't do any good. Let us draw lots!"

Monica liked the scheme, and watched Betty cut three small squares of paper of equal size, and mark one with an ominous cross. Then she began to object.

"That's not fair. Vera will draw first as eldest, and then you. I shall not have any chance at all."

"Fetch a pack of cards, Betty," suggested Vera, "and let us each draw one. Whoever gets the lowest shall go and seek her fortune. That will be fairer."

The Rector of Appleton was not a rigid ascetic, and simple card games had been played by his children ever since they could remember, so that Betty had not much difficulty in hunting up a somewhat shabby pack, which she carried out to her sisters on the lawn.

"Phyllis shall hold them, and we will all draw one in turn," announced Monica. "Do you know I feel all in a tremble. It's very foolish, for of course, even if the lot falls on me, it may be months before we hear of anything suitable."

"You shall draw first," said Vera, good-naturedly, "as you are the youngest."

Judging from her face of woe, poor Monica had drawn a very low card, indeed; and, strange to say, Vera; whose turn came next, did not look much more cheerful at the result of her experiment. Betty's face was grave, certainly, but by no means downcast, as she exhibited her own "fate," the two of diamonds!

"I expect it is me," she said, cheerfully. "You know we agreed the ace should be the highest. No one can have anything lower."

"I am so glad," said Monica, with the frankest selfishness. "Do you know I drew a three, and I was awfully frightened mine would be the lowest!"

"We all had a narrow escape," observed Vera, "for mine was a four!"

"And now, Betty," demanded the younger sister, "what do you mean to do? We have have all unanimously decided one of us must go out into the world before the children come home. They will be here on the first of August, and this is the twenty-second of June, so you have nearly six weeks to find a career."

"I shall find it," said Betty, cheerfully.

"I don't know how!" said Gladys, in

an aggrieved tone. "It is eight years since I left off lessons, and I am sure I never heard of a desirable post vacant."

"Perhaps you did not look for one?" said Betty, drily. "Well, I can't talk any longer, girls, for I promised to go into Littleby on some errands for mother, and it's time I started. Will one of you come with me?"

"Walk six miles in this heat!" exclaimed Monica. "No, thank you, Betty!" Then Betty hesitated, as she always did when she needed to ask a favour of these sisters of hers—"If you don't mind, girls, I would rather father and mother know nothing of our drawing lots until I have something in view. It won't trouble them so much when something is nearly settled!"

"I must say your conceit amazes me, Betty!" reproved the family beauty. "First, you affect to think father and mother would be inconsolable for your loss, though you know perfectly they could spare you better than any of us. Then you take it for granted you will 'get something' directly, although the newspapers are crowded with the advertisements of experienced governesses with the highest testimonials. I am positively ashamed of you!"

Poor Betty! She went upstairs to her mother's room to receive her final instructions, and was not cheered on her way by any word of maternal gratitude for the six mile walk so unselfishly undertaken in the June sunshine.

"Dear me! I wish it was one of the others going," complained poor Mrs. Lester. "You are no hand at a bargain, Betty! You pay people just what they ask!"

"But if they only ask a fair price, mamma, it seems wrong to beat them down; and if they ask too much I come away without buying, so that it all comes to the same thing."

"All such notions might have done very well if your poor father had had his rights, and been Vicar of Littleby; but while he's starving here we need to look at every penny!"

Betty was the only person in the Rectory who did not condemn Lucius Ardley for accepting the living of Littleby over his Rector's head.

She had only been a girl of fourteen when it happened; but she had grasped the fact that there were two sides to the story, and only one was looked at at Appleton Rectory.

She adored her father. He was the only creature in the home who never gave her a cross word.

She knew he had been bitterly hurt at being "passed over," and yet her sympathy leaned to the other side.

She knew that if Mr. Clayton had not come forward with his twenty thousand pounds Littleby would never have been separated, and her father to this day would have been paying a curate at least a hundred a-year to take charge of it.

She knew that Lucius Ardley had devoted himself heart and soul to the parish for seven long years without thought of reward, and that the poor and sick, the aged, and the little children, loved him.

To lose him would have been a bitter blow to all the people in Littleby. It would have been disappointing many families instead of one.

She knew something more, which at Appleton Rectory was only remembered as an extra offence against Mr. Ardley. When the matter was settled beyond recall, and Lucius was first Vicar of Littleby, he wrote a long letter to his former Rector, offering in simple, manly terms to resign the eighty pounds a-year diverted from the living of Appleton.

No one, he wrote, need know of the transaction. Mr. Lester could remit the sum to his churchwarden as arranged, and he would return a cheque for the same amount on the following day.

Unfortunately, the old Rector was proud, and poverty had only made him more so. He wrote back that he had not sunk low enough to be an object of public charity, and that the offer was an abominable insult.

It said much for Lucius Ardley's Christian forbearance that when he next met the Lesters he made not the least allusion to this letter. He on his part was always cordial, even friendly, but the Rector and his wife showed too plainly they thought themselves aggrieved. Mr. Lester never returned his ex-orate's visits. Mrs. Lester never called on Beatrice Ardley when she came home a bride; and in spite of the efforts of the younger couple, the intercourse between them grew very strained.

The Ardleys were rich, and the Lesters regarded the fact almost as a crime, and yet they had been glad enough in days gone by, when Lucius came among them, a young deacon, that he had private means sufficient to permit him to accept a very small stipend.

Regarding Phyllis, Lucius was innocent of any design on her affections. She was so young, when he first knew her, that his manner to her was less formal than it might have been had he met her first a few years later. Pressed to spend his leisure at Appleton Rectory, he had done so, and become almost one of the family; but as Sophy was only two years old when he first came among them, and Gladys and Vera girls in short frocks and long pig-tails—the idea of being suspected of "intentions," never crossed his mind. He was only a new comer when Betty returned a stranger to her father's home, and the seven-year-old child had clung to the silent young man with a hidden depth of affection no time had ever quite effaced. At fourteen Betty had a clear judgment. She weighed the charges against Mr. Ardley, and acquitted him. Her verdict was he had liked Phyllis as a friend and nothing more. She had seen him sit talking to her sister for an hour on parish matters; but she had never seen his eyes follow Phyllis' every movement with beaming affection, as she saw them rest on Miss Clayton, the first time she met them together after their engagements.

It was a long way to Littleby, and at four o'clock, on a scorching June afternoon, there was not a particle of shade to be found anywhere. Poor Betty began to feel strangely faint and tired when just a mile out of Littleby. At the foot of a very steep hill she came upon Mrs. Ardley's pretty pony carriage—the lady driving herself, and a small boy in the seat behind. Before Betty had well recognised who it was the ponies stopped. The boy in buttons sprang out, and accosted her with a message from his mistress. Would not Miss Lester accept a seat in the carriage?

Gladys would have refused, regretfully, for she loved her ease. The others would have stalked on in gloomy silence; but Betty gratefully said "Yes." She had been thinking that of all the people she had ever met she would rather take Mr. Ardley's advice on her future career, and perhaps this was a chance of getting it.

Mrs. Ardley, though a five years' wife, looked hardly older than Betty. She was very pretty, and report said very good. The ample wealth she had brought her husband did much for the prosperity of Littleby, and if her health was too delicate to admit of her undertaking much parochial work, every sad and sorrowful creature in the place was remembered by her.

"What an age it is since I have seen you?" she said, pleasantly to Betty. "Are you going shopping?"

"Yes. Mother wanted some things, and she does not care to walk so far herself."

"Well," said Mrs. Ardley, pleasantly, "the shops don't close till seven. You will have plenty of time to come in and have tea with us. It will be cooler afterwards for your walk home."

"But—"

"Oh, you must come," said Bae, decidedly. "You have never even seen my baby, and I assure you the young gentleman is worth looking at!"

"Is he like you?"

"No," and the young mother laughed. "He

is the image of his father; and now tell me, how is everyone at Appleton? We heard Mr. Lester had not been well."

"Father has had a great many headaches," said Betty, thoughtfully. "I fancy he wants a change."

They had stopped at the Vicarage now. Beatrice gave an order to the boy-groom in an undertone, and then led the way to her pleasant shaded drawing-room. It always seemed to Betty the prettiest room she had ever seen.

There was nothing costly or fantastic about it, only everything was in perfect taste, and the whole was so harmonious as to be refreshing to tired eyes and weary brain.

"Lucius will be in soon," said Mrs. Ardley, as she rang for tea. "Do you know, Betty, I always used to call you Betty, and it comes more naturally than Miss Lester, you are looking very white? Have you been having bad headaches as well as the Rector?"

Something like tears glittered in the brown eyes, and with ready tact Bae went away bravely to find her baby—really to put her head into her husband's study, and confide the case to him.

"Lucius, Betty Lester is in the drawing-room. I found her at the bottom of Littleby Hill with a huge market basket, and looking ready to drop. I think those people treat that poor girl abominably. She is made a perfect Cinderella of!"

"Bae!"

"It's quite true," said Bae, saucily. "I want you to go and talk to her. I'm almost a stranger, and it would be impertinent in me to try and advise her; but I am certain there is something very wrong at the Rectory. She looks ready to cry."

The Vicar rose, a handsome man of six or seven-and-thirty, with a strange peace stamped on his brow, and a trace of sadness in his eyes.

Prosperous to outward eyes, Lucius Ardley had yet suffered terribly. Of the four children given to him three had gone home to Heaven, and he knew but too well by what a slender tenure he held their mother. He worshipped his wife, and yet he never about his eyes to her terribly fragile constitution.

"Way, Betty, it is almost like old times to meet together at a tea-table," was his greeting, as he came into drawing-room, and took the girl's hand in a friendly grasp. "What have you been doing to yourself? You look like a little white ghost!"

"Oh! Mr. Ardley," her tears fairly started at these kindly words, "I am so tired!"

"The walk was too much for you," he said, kindly. "You should not be too energetic, Betty; and, really, six miles in this sun is enough to tire anyone."

"I didn't mean that. The walk is nothing, but I am tired of everything. Things are all going wrong at home. Father frets and mother cries till she is quite ill, and at last we girls decided to day one of us must do something, and the lot fell upon me!"

"So much the better," said the Vicar, warmly. "You have more 'grit,' as the Americans call it, than any of the others; besides, they would waste months waiting for an opportunity. You, I expect, will make one."

"If I only can."

"Here comes my wife," said Lucius, stretching out his arm to take his boy, "and the prince of babies. Bae, do you know Betty has resolved to be like the girl in the old fairy tale, and go and seek her fortune? Can you tell her how to set about it?"

Bae's spirit was too saucy for her to have any doubts. She spoke promptly.

"What would you like to do, Betty? People work so much better when their heart is in it."

"Anything but teaching," replied Betty, quickly. "The sound of five-fingered exercises rubs me all the wrong way."

"Should you like to go abroad, and have you any aversion to sick people?"

"Bee, what are you driving at? I am sure you have thought of something," said her husband, while Betty answered,—

"I should like to go abroad of all things, and I like sick people. I am so sorry for them."

Bee clapped her hands.

"There, I see it all! My Cousin Rosamond is going to South Africa for her health in August, and aunt is trying to find a young lady to go with her as companion, because she hates the thought of her being alone. They live in a very pretty part of Yorkshire, and whoever undertakes the post is to go and stay with them for a month before sailing, so that they may get to know her. I think Betty is cut out for it. We know she is cheerful. If she isn't strong, the voyage will make her so, and Rosamond is such a dear girl. It can't be dull to be with her."

"If they would only have me," pleaded Betty. "But—"

She could not explain to her listeners that the name of "Clayton" was to her family what a red rag is supposed to be to a bull, and that to speak of her possible employers as Mrs. Ardley's relations would be to lose all chance of being allowed to go to them.

However, the Ardleys understood pretty well how they were regarded at Appleton Rectory, and Bee set Betty's mind at rest by saying kindly,—

"I will write to my aunt by to night's post. Her name is Vernon, and she has never been in this neighbourhood, so that no one will connect her with us. I will give her a hint not to mention me in writing to you, and if the post is still vacant, I am sure you will hear from her in a few days."

"Don't go!" said Lucius, as Betty rose, mindful of the purchases yet to be made.

"There's no hurry, and you are so tired!"

"But my shopping!"

"Well, I am going into the town, and it won't be the first time I have executed your mother's commissions."

But Betty refused. All she would agree to was that when her shopping was done she would return to the Vicarage, and let Beatrice drive her part of the way home—not all the way, since for her to be seen by her family behind Mrs. Ardley's ponies would have been a dire offence in their eyes.

"Good-bye," she said to Bee, gratefully, when she was finally set down with her basket about a mile from home. "I don't know how to thank you. I feel you have given me my chance."

CHAPTER II.

AN old authenticated proverb tells us troubles never come alone, and the same thing might be averred of chances.

For many a year the Lester's relations had not troubled about their needy kindred beyond sending them a Christmas card, or a rare letter of meaningless platitudes.

But the morning after Betty's visit to the Ardleys a strange thing happened. There arrived one of those monogrammed envelopes which, as children, the girls used to admire, but which had been seldom seen of late years at the Rectory; and the contents were so bulky that Mrs. Masterson must certainly have written two or three sheets to her sister instead of the scantily-covered two pages with which she usually favoured her.

Mrs. Lester put on her spectacles and read the epistle through carefully, then she looked at her daughters and sighed.

"Your aunt is most eccentric. After all these years of neglect she actually invites one of you on a long visit. She is going to Switzerland, and then on to the Rhine and Italy. She offers to pay all your expenses, and treat you in every respect as a child of her own, but she makes most peculiar conditions," quoting from the letter. "She must

pledge herself to remain with me till March, and, above all things, not to be homesick. If there is one thing I abominate more than another it is tear stains and red eyes."

"She must be a horrid woman," said Betty frankly. "She wants to make a white slave of one of us!"

"You needn't be afraid," said Gladys, sneeringly, "it is not likely mother would give such a splendid chance to you while we three elder ones would profit by it!"

"I don't want to go!" said Betty, brusquely. Mrs. Lester looked at her sharply.

"Your Aunt Marion particularly requests that I should send you, Betty. She thinks, having been from home before, you would not feel the separation."

Vera, Gladys, and even Monica looked at Betty with curious eyes.

"It isn't fair!" said the beauty, with an ominous whimper in her voice. "I am sure if Aunt Marion saw what an ugly little brown thing Betty is she would never want to take her."

"If a younger one goes at all," put in Monica, sharply, "it ought to be me. Think of the good it would do my French to travel abroad."

"And I have wanted to see Switzerland all my life!" chimed in Vera. "I do call it too bad that Betty should have such a splendid chance!"

"And Betty is sure to disgrace us all by her fancies and bluntness," said the mother, regretfully; "besides, she is the only plain one among my children. No one is likely to marry Betty. Now, if you went, Gladys, you would be sure to marry a rich husband, and then you could provide for your sisters."

"Don't be uneasy, mother," said Betty, speaking in a hard, constrained sort of voice. "I don't mean to go! I won't go! You can write to Mrs. Masterson, and say so!"

"Elizabeth!" cried her mother indignantly, "aren't you ashamed of yourself. I never heard of such base ingratitude!"

"No!" replied Betty, slowly. "I don't think I am ashamed, and I want to earn my own living. I don't think seven or nine months' travelling with a rich relation would make me more inclined to work when I came back. You had better send one of the other girls, mother, and let me shift for myself."

No one thanked her for her selfishness. A letter was sent to Aunt Marion, setting forth that Betty was much too troublesome and uncouth to be given such a treat.

Gladys, the next in age, would be delighted to accompany her. She was the prettiest of the family, and would do credit to her kind relation, etc., etc.

Poor Betty went about that day like a creature in a dream. She was quite sure the Ardleys would remember their promise, and she felt she could be very happy with the Vernons if they were at all like Beatrice; but for all that she was restless and unsettled.

She felt that the sooner she was away from Appleton the better, for nothing but black looks met her on all sides.

"You know," said Gladys, sharply, "this doesn't release you from your promise, Betty? We agreed one of us must turn out into the world, and the lot fell upon you."

Betty nodded.

"Don't be frightened, Gladys. I am seeking a situation. In fact, I have heard of one already."

"I suppose you answered an advertisement?"

Betty found it convenient to ignore this question, and Gladys reported to her mother and sisters that "silly Betty had answered an advertisement, and quite believed she should get the situation."

"I wonder she did not call it 'place!'" said Monica, contemptuously. "Betty has no refinement. Did you hear what it was, pray, Gladys—ladies' maid or nursery governess?"

"She didn't say. I should fancy it was mother's help. I don't suppose she will ever hear any more about it!"

But just four days later Betty, to the extreme amazement of her relations, received a letter, with a crest as elegant as Mrs. Masterson's monogram; and though it was difficult to read anything with the eyes of her assembled family all fixed on her face, in two minutes she had mastered the contents.

It was a kind letter, almost a friendly one. Lady Vernon—the title was an unexpected revelation—wrote that she thought Miss Lester would suit her daughter admirably as a companion.

The Rector of Appleton was well known to herself and Sir Jasper by name, and they should be glad to receive any child of his entirely as a member of their family.

The salary they offered was a hundred guineas a year; but as there was no accounting for an invalid's fancies, they would prefer to make the engagement for three months only, until they saw whether their daughter and Miss Lester seemed mutually satisfied.

In conclusion, the lady named not only the day but the train by which Betty was to travel. She should be in London herself next week, and if Miss Lester came up by the 3.35 train from Littleby she would meet it at Victoria, and take her to her hotel for the night, whence they could start together for Yorkshire on Wednesday morning.

By the time Betty had finished reading this the "girls'" curiosity knew no bounds.

"Pray in what form of 'unskilled labour' are you going to start?" asked Monica.

"If you go out as ladies' maid it will be a disgrace to us all!" said Gladys.

"Don't you see how grave she looks?" concluded Vera. "Depend upon it girls, the letter is to say the advertisement came from a registry office, and they will put her name on the book for half-a-crown!"

Betty left her seat walked round to the head of the table, and, unprecedented thing, appealed to her father.

"Papa, I am your child too as well as the others. Won't you take my part, and prevent their laughing at me just because I want to earn my own living?"

Mrs. Lester ordered the girl back to her place, but the Rector interposed. For once his heart was touched.

He remembered how twelve years before he had robbed Betty of a happy home by preventing her remaining with his sister and her husband. It struck him suddenly he had not done very much to make the girl's life happy since.

"My dear, I am sure no one wishes to laugh at you, and as to earning your own living it is what the whole seven of you will have to do before many years are over your heads. I only wish I had started you all out in turn as you grew up, like boys. It would have been easier for you all in the end!"

"Papa, will you please read this letter, and say that I may go. I want to go so very much. It would seem like throwing away a chance if I did not."

"You had better read the letter aloud," said Mrs. Lester, acidly. "Elizabeth sets her mother at defiance; but troublesome and rebellious as she is, I will not hear of her taking any menial work. Fancy Vera and Gladys having to confess to a sister in service!"

There was a twinkle in the Rector's eye as he began to read Lady Vernon's letter aloud. He had not quite lost his sense of humour even after thirty years at Appleton.

"Hem," said Mrs. Lester, when he had finished, "she is the wife of some city knight, I suppose, and Betty will be a humble sick nurse!"

"My dear," replied her husband, "Sir Jasper Vernon is an officer of almost worldwide fame. The family have lived in Yorkshire for centuries, and if you had listened to the letter you would have heard Lady Vernon expressly says Elizabeth will be received entirely as a member of the family."

Mrs. Lester looked at Betty's well-worn grey dress, and smiled a little scornfully. "She won't look like one at any rate."

"We must do our best," said the Rector, cheerfully. "You asked me for five pounds to rig Gladys out for her visit to her aunt. We can hardly do less for Betty."

"Betty will be back on our hands in three months."

"I doubt it," said the Rector, kindly. "From this letter Lady Vernon seems a generous minded woman. If Betty fails to please her invalid daughter I expect she will help her to find a good situation elsewhere. Anyway, Betty, the five pounds shall be ready for you. Why, your fare to Yorkshire will take nearly half of it. I am afraid, my dear, there won't be much left over for your wardrobe."

But help was at hand for that. When Betty had written two letters, one to Lady Vernon, gratefully accepting the situation, and another to Mrs. Ardley, thanking her for her kindness, she thought all her correspondence was ended; but coming out of Sunday-school a letter was put into her hand, which quite relieved any wardrobe difficulties. Beatrice Ardley wrote so tactfully that the proudest nature could hardly be offended. She said, knowing the time for preparation was very short, and that Betty had a great deal to occupy it, she hoped she would accept from such old friends as herself and Lucius a few trifles likely to be useful to her.

She should be in London shopping on Monday, and must visit her aunt at the Grosvenor Hotel. Nothing could be easier than for her to choose what things she thought best for Betty, and have them packed and sent straight to the hotel.

Betty understood everything—the perfect tact which had saved her from receiving this letter under the eyes of her family, and also spared her from having to hide her new possessions from their eyes.

"I wonder if it is being rich does it?" thought Betty, a little regretfully. "Beatrice Ardley has not seen me a dozen times, and yet she seems really to care that I should be happy. I believe the girls are actually hoping I should be sent home from the Castle a failure."

Mrs. Lester was surprised that beyond a neat dust-cloak and a pair of good kid gloves, Betty made no toilet purchases out of her five pounds. The Rector took his daughter to the station, and bought her ticket, second-class, out of his own slender purse. He was not an emotional man, but his voice sounded very sad as he wished her good-bye.

"I think you are right to go, my dear, no matter who blames you; and while I live there is always a home for you, however humble; so come straight back to us if you are unhappy."

Betty shook her head.

"I shall stay if they will keep me. I should feel like a deserter if I ran away just because things weren't very comfortable, papa!"

"I am afraid they haven't been made very comfortable to you at home, my dear!" he said, sadly; and then the train bore Betty out of sight of his grey head, and, after brushing away a few tears, she set to work to think over all she had ever heard of the Vernons.

It was little enough. Lady Vernon was Beatrice Ardley's aunt. Probably she and the late Mrs. Clayton had been sisters. Beatrice had implied there was a large family, else surely the mother would have gone abroad herself with the sick girl. Then there was her father's statement, that Sir Jasper was an officer of almost world wide fame, and that the family had been known for centuries in Yorkshire. It was a very simple story, but Betty was provoked with herself for thinking there was something unnatural about it. Why, if there were numbers of other children, did not a brother or sister join the party? And why did a lady of such high position, who might naturally be supposed to have rigid notions of etiquette, propose for her daughter to travel thousands of miles without a chaperone?

One fear died out as soon as she had seen

Lady Vernon. There would be no slights or humiliations to bear from that sweet-faced woman, whose soft grey hair must surely have been silvered by trouble rather than time, since she had the complexion and walk of early middle-age. She was dressed in black. A soft lace bonnet, with feathery white flowers, seemed made on purpose for her grave, still face, and the welcome she gave to Betty was kind to a degree.

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Lester! I wonder you were not afraid to go so far from home as Yorkshire?"

"There are a great many of us," said Betty, frankly, "and I wanted to help papa."

Lady Vernon smiled.

"Mrs. Ardley seems very fond of you! She was with me yesterday. I think I never saw anyone look so happy!"

"And she is so beautiful?" said Betty, eagerly. "She always looks just like a picture!"

Lady Vernon laughed.

"I never thought of that. Some people say my daughter, Rosamond, is like her cousin; but, if so, Bee has certainly carried off all the sunshine, and left Rose the shade."

"Is Miss Vernon very ill?"

"I do not think she would be ill if she could only rouse herself," said the mother, gravely. "Before you see my daughter, Miss Lester, there are two or three things I must tell you about her, but first we will have tea."

They had reached the hotel, and were sitting in Lady Vernon's private room. Tea was served at once, and a respectable looking woman appeared with it, to carry away Lady Vernon's wraps.

"This is Dorcas," said her mistress, kindly, "and she has been my maid ever since I came home a bride. You must help Miss Lester unpack presently, Dorcas. She is a great friend of Mrs. Ardley's."

The maid smiled and retired. Betty found her thoughts wandering to Rosamond Vernon, even while she sipped her delicious tea and ate her pound cake. What was the secret in the life of Bee's cousin, whose fate outwardly seemed so fair and prosperous? That there was a secret Betty felt convinced.

CHAPTER III.

MR. LESTER was quite right in thinking the Vernons were rich. Their wealth was almost fabulous, and, like most old families, their property was strictly entailed.

The baronetcy could only descend in the male line, but the beautiful old castle, with its broad acres, all other lands and revenues, could be inherited by a daughter. In a word, the moment the breath was out of Sir Jasper's body his nephew would be Sir Richard Vernon; but not a foot of land, not a shilling of money, would be his.

He would take simply a barren title, and everything else, of whatever nature, would pass to his first cousin, beautiful Rosamond.

For, unlike Betty's expectations, Rosamond was an only child. Her father did not marry till he left the army, and came into the property. By that time his next brother, a year his junior, had quite a large family of sons and daughters; and knowing the chances of military life, convinced, besides, that Jasper was "out out for a bachelor," Mr. and Mrs. Vernon had fully persuaded themselves their first-born would one day be Sir Richard, and master of Vernon Castle.

Sir Jasper married at forty a beautiful girl of twenty, sister of Walter Clayton, the wealthy manufacturer.

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon abused him and his wife in no mild tones, and said that their son, then a lad at Eton, had been defrauded of his rights; but when the years rolled on, and no child was born to Lady Vernon, their hopes ran high.

Young Dick openly boasted of his heirship, and was bred to no profession in consequence. Judge, then, of the confusion and dismay which

filled the hearts of himself and his parents when, exactly eight years after her father's wedding-day, Rosamond was born!

One life, and that a girl's, between him and vast wealth. Dick was almost frantic. If infant marriages had been in vogue he would certainly have proposed for the baby heiress on the spot. As it was he had no remedy except to rail against providence in general, and his uncle and aunt in particular, which, though it might relieve his feelings, hardly improved his fortunes.

From the year of Rosamond's birth a feud raged between the Richard Vernons and her parents. At first Sir Jasper and his wife tried in vain to make peace, but at last, wearied of rebuffs, they gave up the struggle, and the estrangement continued.

From time to time Sir Jasper would hear of his nephew, the elder Richard died while Rosamond was still a child, as leading the life of a reckless adventurer about town, and once it was reported that Dick still took "long odds" he should yet be master of Vernon Castle.

An almost superstitious fear for their child's safety assailed Sir Jasper and Lady Vernon when this rumour reached them. They would gladly have taken Rosamond away, and travelled perpetually from place to place; but property has its duties and responsibilities. Sir Jasper could not leave Yorkshire for any lengthened time, and as he pointed out to his wife, in their own home surely the child was safer than elsewhere.

So things went on until just six months before Rosamond was engaged to one of their nearest neighbours, Eustace Dacre, the second son of Lord Daneleigh, one of Sir Jasper's lifelong friends.

It was not a brilliant match for such an heiress, but it pleased everyone. Lord Daneleigh consented that Eustace should assume the name of Vernon, which was the wish of Sir Jasper's heart.

Lady Vernon rejoiced that as he had no estate of his own he would be content to reside at the Dover House, and so keep their darling near her old home.

The wedding was fixed for August, and all went merrily until just five months before that time the *fancie* suddenly began to fade.

It was in April that her strength first failed her. She caught a severe cold, and the lassitude often felt in early spring prevented her shaking off its effects—one day better, the next worse. Even her anxious parents were not seriously alarmed until the local doctor asked for further advice.

A great physician came down from London, and declared Miss Vernon to be in an early stage of consumption. She must go abroad in August, and remain away the whole of the winter. Informed that her wedding-day was fixed he said peremptorily the ceremony must be postponed.

Almost beside themselves with grief Sir Jasper and his wife felt it was simply impossible for them always to conceal their anxiety.

Rosamond was weak and listless. She required constant, cheerful society, and so the idea originated of having a companion.

"Only don't advertise," said the Baronet, eagerly. "I don't care if the companion is ugly or stupid, but we must know who she is, and where she comes from. Dick Vernon is quite capable of sending some spy of his own to gloat over our misery. So that she is young and cheerful, and we know her antecedents, I don't mind whom you have."

In this mood he welcomed Beatrice Ardley's letter almost as a Providence, and instructed his wife to engage her *protégée* at once. It says something for the superstitious dread he entertained of his nephew that he insisted on his wife's meeting Betty as soon as she reached London, and keeping her under her eye till they arrived at the Castle.

Poor Lady Vernon! Her heart was very heavy as she watched Betty, and wondered how much to tell her. The girl had impressed

her very favourably. She liked the simple, frank-mannered and clear, musical voice.

"My dear," she said, gravely, when it was growing late, and she felt she must get her warning over if she would not leave it till the morning, "do you understand anything of illness?"

"Very little," confessed Betty. "But I am fond of being with invalids, and trying to cheer them. I have a very good memory, so I should be sure not to forget anything you told me."

Lady Vernon told her simply of Rosamond's engagement—her sudden weakness, and the doctor's peremptory postponement of her wedding.

"He assures us the great thing is to keep her always cheerful, and never give way to grief in her presence. But, Miss Lester, when our hearts are well-nigh broken, it is a hard duty."

"Does Miss Vernon suffer any pain?"

"She has had headaches, and complains of feeling weak and tired. Some days she seems much better. It is more like an attack of low fever than anything else, only low fever does not last so long."

"Mr. Daneleigh must be very anxious?"

"Anxious and angry too. He declares if they were only married, and he took her away to fresh scenes, she would recover at once."

"It seems so strange!" said Betty, gravely. "She cannot have any trouble?"

"Her whole life has been cloudless."

"And everyone wants her to live." There was a strange moistness about the girl's eyes, as though she were thinking of the contrast between her own lot and Rosamond's.

"Not everyone," cried Lady Vernon, impulsively. "My husband's nephew is a cruel, wicked man, and he hates our poor child because her life stands between him and wealth. When the bell tolls for Rosamond it will be a more welcome sound to him than the maddest, merriest joybells ever rung."

"Please don't think Miss Vernon is going to die," said Betty, eagerly. "I have always heard love could do more than anything else for sick people—and she has so much love. I think she must get better, only for that."

Then Lady Vernon did something which surprised the little companion extremely. She rose, and stooping over Betty, kissed her cheek.

Sleep was not to come to the fourth Miss Lester just yet. When she reached her own room it was to find the maid Dorcas mounting guard there. She had unpacked the small bag which held all Betty was likely to need in London, and yet she lingered as though loth to go away. Perhaps, like her lady, she had some confidences she wished to make before the journey to Yorkshire.

"My lady told me you were a friend of Mrs. Ardley, our Miss Bearice?" she began, slowly. "If that's so, there's a word I'd like to say to you, Miss Lester."

"Mrs. Ardley is the kindest friend I ever had, Dorcas," answered Betty, frankly.

"And maybe, miss, she told you what was the matter with my young lady?"

"She spoke of consumption."

Dorcas tossed her head.

"Then they've made her believe it too! It's no more consumption than it's mumps; and that stuck-up London doctor only called it so because he hadn't sense enough to confess he didn't understand it as honest old Mr. Elton did. It's my belief, Miss Leslie, whenever people don't know what to call a thing, they just put it down as consumption!"

"I thought it was in the family?" confessed Betty. "When Mrs. Ardley was a girl I know it was feared for her!"

Dorcas nodded.

"It's in her blood. Her mother died of it; but Mrs. Clayton was no relation to Miss Rosamond, save by marriage. No, Miss Lester, I daren't hint the truth to my lady. She'd set me down as a mad woman, and Sir Jasper would be for turning me out of the

house in a rage; but it's my firm belief Miss Rose is being poisoned."

"Poisoned!"

Dorcas had succeeded in amazing Miss Lester—at any rate, she looked rather pleased at Betty's white face, and continued,—

"It's a wicked world, miss, and men are a bad lot, more or less. The master's nephew belongs to the more, not the less. He knows that only my young lady's life stands between him and the property. What does he do? Keeps quiet until she's going to be married. Miss Rose never said anything in her life till her wedding day was fixed."

"But," Betty felt rather afraid to contradict this determined Dorcas, "I thought Mr. Vernon and his cousin had never met?"

"No more they have, Miss Lester, but no doubt he's ways and means. When a man's sold himself body and soul to the evil one sin is made easy to him. Why, everyone knows the illnesses doctors can't make out are poison nine times out of ten, and that's just what it is in my young lady's case, or my name's not Dorcas."

"It seems too awful to be true."

"A good many awful things are true, for all that. Now, I darenay, Miss Lester, you are wondering why I have told you all this?"

"I cannot quite understand."

"Then I'll tell you. I'm quite convinced there's foul play at the Castle, but I can't find out how it's done. I watch and wait, but most of my time is spent away from Miss Rose; and, of course, I can't do so much as a person constantly with her. What I want you to do is to keep your eyes open, and if you see anything you think odd to tell me at once. If two people speak, my lady can't call it fancy; and seeing you're a stranger to the Castle, she won't call your objections jealousy of new-comers."

Poor Betty! Very little sleep visited her eyes that night. It seemed to her that she stood on the threshold of a great mystery. Evidently Dorcas was devoted to the "family." Just as evidently she honestly believed the terrible thing she asserted, and being a sharp-witted woman, might see what would escape her grief-stricken preoccupied mistress. Clearly, too, Dorcas suspected someone, but whom. It seemed to Betty Lester simply impossible that the fair young daughter of this noble house could be done to death gradually, relentlessly, under her parents' very eyes.

Betty had not read many novels, but she knew from the few scientific works in her father's scanty library that there were poisons so subtle in their effects it required the greatest care to detect their use.

She had read in historical books of poisoned flowers and bouquets, which conveyed death to their ill-fated recipients.

She had heard her father and Mr. Ardley years before, discuss a famous poisoning case, and the young clergyman gave it as his opinion, that the crime would never have been discovered if the murderer had not grown impatient of his victim's slow decay, and hurried the end, which spoiled all his previous precautions.

She shut her eyes, and tried to unravel the problem. Granted for a moment that Dorcas was right, and poison, not consumption, at the root of Rosamond's illness, leaving unsolved the question of who administered it, another puzzle remained. How was it done? Betty solved this enigma before she slept.

Miss Vernon, in her invalid state, must, of necessity, have sick-room dainties between meals unshared by the rest of the family, cooling drinks, or strengthening broth. The mischief, if, indeed, there were mischief, was introduced into these.

"My dear child, how tired you look!" was Lady Vernon's greeting the next day at breakfast. "Did you not sleep well?"

"Not very!" and, fearing more questions, Betty added quickly, "you see I have not spent a night away from home since I was seven years' old, and everything seems so strange."

"I hope you will try and feel at home at the Castle!" said Lady Vernon, kindly. "It is a sadly-changed place from what it was six months ago; but we will do our best to make you happy!"

It was a very long journey, for Vernon Castle was on the east coast of Yorkshire, some miles beyond Whitby.

It was past six o'clock when they at last reached Whitby station; and as soon as the train stopped a tall, thoughtful-looking gentleman approached their carriage, and saluted Lady Vernon with the words,—

"Rose is decidedly better this afternoon. I thought you would like the last account!"

"How very good of you, Wilfred?" and then she introduced him to Betty as Mr. Daneleigh; and the girl understood he was not Miss Vernon's fiancé, but his elder brother.

Mr. Daneleigh took them to their carriage. One of the Vernon servants was in attendance, with a light cart for the luggage.

Wilfred would have said good-bye, but Lady Vernon detained him.

"Come home with us to dinner!" she said warmly, "unless your father will be lonely without you?"

Mr. Daneleigh took a seat opposite the ladies, and answered with a smile.—

"I am only too pleased to come, Lady Vernon. My father is in Fiji—at least, I mean he is on his way there. He sailed yesterday."

"Wilfred!"

"He had been worrying about the straits of the Fiji Islands for months, and I told him on Sunday in jest he'd never feel satisfied on the subject until he had been to see. To my amazement on Monday, at breakfast, he thanked me for my advice, said he should go to London by the morning train, and sail for Fiji on Tuesday if he could get a passage in the *Ocean Queen*. I got a telegram this morning from his lawyer saying he had sailed."

"He is indefatigable!"

"He is one of the ablest scientific men of the day," said Wilfred, with honest pride, "and I am sure his discoveries are invaluable to geologists, though I can never see much good in them myself. However, it pleases the dear old man, and as he is as strong and hearty as he was thirty years ago I don't see why he shouldn't take a trip to Fiji and back at a day's notice if he pleases, even though he is some years over sixty."

"What does Eustace say?"

"Eustace promised he and Rosamond would touch at Fiji on their wedding tour. Though, in that case, I don't know where their final destination would be, since I never heard of Fiji being in the route to anywhere else."

"Then Eustace is cheerful?"

"And Sir Jasper, too. Rose had actually been for a drive this morning and not felt too tired. I assure you it sent us all into the wildest spirits."

"If only I dared to hope," breathed the mother.

"You must try," urged Wilfred, affectionately. "I am sure Miss Lester will tell you what we are all so fond of urging, that cheerfulness is half the battle in a case like Rosamond's."

Betty smiled, and said gravely,—

"I am sure it is."

There flashed a look of approval from Wilfred's blue eyes, and from that moment she felt he was her friend.

He had not the gay, *débonnaire* manner, the bright, almost boyish face of Rosamond Vernon's lover, but it was a brave, manly countenance, and one you felt instinctively you could trust.

Dorcas had been left behind to follow with the luggage, so she did not witness Betty's entrance to the Vernon Castle.

The General, as people who remembered his military rank still often called Sir Jasper, shook hands with her, and welcomed her kindly; but his face was grave, almost sad,

and his wife, who understood his every look, asked hastily,—

"Is Rose worse?"

"A bad fainting fit. It came on just after Wilfred started, and Julia thought she would never bring her to; but she has rallied now, and is very anxious to see Miss Lester."

They took Betty upstairs to a beautiful room on the first floor, furnished in pale blue silk and ebony. On a sofa drawn up to the open window lay the fair young daughter of the house. A maid in a plain alpaca dress, and the neatest of white caps, sat watching her, and a strange prejudice arose in Betty's heart as she noticed the white lips and dull, heavy black eyes. From a very little child she had always been afraid of people with white lips and heavy, sleepy black eyes.

"You can go now, Julia," said Lady Vernon; and with a silent courtesy the maid withdrew, and Rosamond Vernon, extending a thin white hand, said gently,—

"I am very pleased to see you, Miss Lester."

She looked into Betty's brown eyes with a strange, searching glance, and, seeming satisfied with the scrutiny, an expression of great peace came to her own grey ones. She held Betty's hand in her feverish clasp, and said in her sweet, weary voice,—

"I am sure we shall be friends."

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK passed, and then a month. Betty began to feel perfectly at home at Vernon Castle. Rosamond loved her dearly. Eustace Daneleigh, who almost lived with the Vernons in these days, came to her for comfort and hope about his darling as freely as if she had been his sister.

Sir Jasper and Lady Vernon were quite satisfied with their niece's recommendation, and the only member of the household who did not approve of Miss Lester was the dull-eyed waiting maid Julia.

Julia was not a favourite with the other servants. When Rosamond's engagement and speedy marriage were first arranged her mother thought it best to engage a separate maid for her, since she herself could not spare Dorcas, whose services Rose had hitherto shared. After a searching examination of her character Julia Webb was appointed, it being understood she would accompany her young mistress to her new home.

Lady Vernon liked the young woman because she was so quiet and respectful.

Rosamond confessed that "Julia was a good creature, though she should never like anyone so well as dear old Dorcas."

But from the first in the servants' hall the verdict was dead against Webb, who was voted haughty, and stuck up.

When Rosamond's illness began Julia Webb proved an invaluable help in sickness, and was not ungenerally much liked in consequence by Lady Vernon; but Dorcas—whether from jealousy or some other cause could not be told—declared from the first that Julia Webb did not understand illness, and did her young lady more harm than good. Her lady reproached her as "jealous and prejudiced." Poor Dorcas was more convinced than ever; and being of a romantic temperament, in spite of her fifty years, she speedily decided in her own mind that Julia was a spy employed by Richard Vernon to poison Rosamond and so remove the only barrier between him and wealth.

Unluckily for Dorcas, her first complaint had been so insuspicious she dared not form another.

Both Sir Jasper and the young Daneleighs had received a hint from Lady Vernon, Dorcas was intensely prejudiced against Julia Webb, and they would not have listened to her confidences. She had warned Miss Lester in a moment of despair, because she verily believed her young lady was being killed by inches under her eyes.

Betty had not been a week at the Castle before she knew that Julia Webb was her enemy, and would try to injure her if she could. Meanwhile she had discovered nothing to confirm the dread suspicion engendered by Dorcas.

Julia intensely resented being banished from Rosamond's room, when Betty offered to sleep there herself, in case the invalid were wakeful, and wanted company in the night. She was angry if anyone but herself administered the medicine or the invalid meals which Rosamond had to take almost every hour; but then Betty knew that there is nothing in the world a servant is naturally more jealous of than anyone who seems to come between herself and her charge.

She was in a dilemma. Rosamond grew weaker daily, and the doctor shook his head.

A month passed. The "girls" condescended to write to Betty, and tell her how Gladys had started triumphantly on her travels, and the "children" were coming home from school in a few days. They seemed to miss the "ugly little brown thing" more than they expected, and showed more sisterly warmth than Betty had hoped for.

She was walking in the grounds, reading a letter from Mrs. Ardley, one August morning, when the extra half-sheet escaped from her fingers, and, being caught by the breeze, flattered to some distance. Running in pursuit of it, she picked up another paper, alike in size and quality, but whose contents were to turn her sick with horror, and make clear, at least for her, the mystery of Rosamond's serious illness. There were but a few lines on the paper, and these had evidently formed the conclusion of the letter. To anyone who had not heard Dorcas' warning, and was unfamiliar with the Vernon family history, it might have conveyed no meaning. To Betty it told all.

"The appearance of B. L. certainly complicates matters; but, from your last, I should say things were sufficiently advanced for you to hurry up with your task. I want you back again, so make a quick end of your present work, and return to your affectionate father,"

"R. V."

A moment's reflection, and poor Betty decided the writer of this letter was Richard Vernon. He had been four-and-twenty at the time of Rosamond's birth, and must now be within a few years of fifty. There was nothing to prevent his having a grown-up daughter. Julia Webb, disagreeably as she had impressed Betty, had yet many signs of gentle birth. It was one of Lady Vernon's favourite theories that the maid had "seen better days," and therefore could not bring herself down to the company of her fellow-servants. Again and again had this explanation been offered by the gentle mistress of the Castle to account for the peculiar dislike of all her household to the new comer.

What was to be done? Betty felt in her heart that to warn Lady Vernon or Sir Jasper was almost useless. They would never believe anything so wild and improbable as the theory she had imagined.

Eustace Daneleigh was too impulsive. He would have betrayed the suspicions to Julia at once. The only adviser Betty could think of was his elder brother.

She had seen a great deal of Wilfred since she came to Vernon Castle—quite enough to respect and trust him with all her heart; but the difficulties of seeking a private interview with Mr. Daneleigh were well-nigh insuperable. He was at the Castle nearly every day, but every one then claimed his sympathy and company.

Betty knew it would be well-nigh impossible to see him alone there, and so she braved everything, and resolved to walk to the Court, and ask for his young master.

No thought of "Mrs. Grundy" troubled Betty. She forgot that she was a girl in her teens, and Wilfred Daneleigh only a young

man. She felt that Rosamond's very life depended on her efforts.

She could not forget that terrible injunction in R. V.'s letter, "hurry up with your task!"

Perhaps Wilfred Daneleigh had never been more surprised than he was, an hour later, when the butler presented himself in the library with the news that "Miss Lester wished to see Mr. Daneleigh!"

In another ten minutes he would have been on his way to the Castle, and the Vernons possessed plenty of men-servants had they needed to summon him sooner.

Panictiously scrupulous in his ideas of womanly reserve, he felt annoyed with Betty for seeking him in his own home, and greeted her with the most frigid courtesy, which chilled the poor child, though she never understood its cause.

"Is Miss Vernon worse? I should have been at the Castle very shortly!"

"I know! I wanted to see you first."

"Wished to speak to you alone!"

Darker and darker grew Wilfred's face.

"I shall be happy to be of service to any friend of Miss Vernon; but I should have thought Lady Vernon would have been your most natural adviser?"

Betty gathered dimly that he was angry, and plunged headlong into her story.

"I was afraid she would not believe it, and the danger is so great. Oh! Mr. Daneleigh, I have found out what ails Rosamond, and I want you to save her!"

Wilfred's manner changed as though by magic.

"Sit down, Miss Lester," he said, kindly, "and tell me everything. I never believed myself Rosamond's disease was consumption. Old Elton, who attended her from childhood, did not think so. It was only when a fine London physician was called in, who thought it needful to give a name to her illness, even if it proved a wrong one, that we heard of consumption."

"She is being poisoned—and it is Julia Webb who is killing her!"

"I am afraid you have been prejudiced by Dorcas?" began Wilfred; but she interrupted him.

"Mr. Daneleigh, will you please read this? I was walking in the shrubbery this morning reading a letter. One sheet of it blew away, and I picked up this, thinking it my missing page. I know that Julia Webb had been in the same spot just before me!"

Wilfred read it slowly through.

"It seems impossible!" he said, thoughtfully, "and yet every word of this bears out your theory. Have you any proof?"

"Only this. When I first came to the Castle, and Julia slept in Rosamond's room, the morning was always her worst time, she seemed so heavy and drowsy. Now I sleep there, and she takes no food or medicine in the night, she seems to wake quite bright and cheerful. Julia was very angry when the change was made. Once or twice she has brought in beef-tea or arrowroot, and told me to give it to Rosamond as soon as she woke. I never gave it, for she always preferred tea or milk; but once I was very tired and faint, and I took some of the beef-tea myself. Mr. Daneleigh, for hours afterwards I felt almost dazed! My head was so weak and heavy I could hardly keep about."

Wilfred thought two or three minutes.

"It will never do to publish our doubts. From this letter, evidently Julia Webb is prepared to finish her hideous task at a moment's notice. Are you strong-minded, Miss Lester? Do you think you can fight Julia Webb with her own weapons?"

"I could not poison her!"

"I never thought of that. Can you be silent and cautious?"

"Yes."

"Good. I will give Elton a hint. He is a good man, and so to be trusted. He will order Rosamond on no account to leave her room. Now, remember, all depends on this. You

must never leave her even for a moment. The most specious excuses, the most cleverly invented traps, must not tempt you from her side."

Betty nodded.

"But the food? Julia is certain to bring it up herself, and—"

"And you cannot starve an invalid. Granted. I shall get a small hamper packed by my housekeeper, and have it sent over to the Castle, alleging it is a present for Rosamond. You must enlist the aid of old Dorcas to get it brought upstairs, and placed in a cupboard in the sick room. You will feed your patient entirely on its contents for a whole day. Take care to empty the cups and basins Julia brings up, that she may think you have administered them to Rosamond. To-morrow you must give Elton a specimen of each. He will analyse them, and the truth be placed beyond a doubt!"

Betty trembled.

"It seems so terrible that such a plot should have been formed against one so good and beautiful!"

Wilfred pressed her hand kindly.

"My dear Miss Betty, there are men and women, too, alas! who would sell their very souls for gold. The one hope I have for Rosamond is your care. Now, shall I drive you home?"

"No, thank you, I had better walk."

Mr. Elton appeared not long after Betty had resumed her post. He looked at her with a kindly twinkle in his grey eyes, and the very way in which he pressed her hand told her he had seen Mr. Danesleigh.

He declared Rosamond to be alarmingly worse; forbade her positively to leave her room, and urged that all excitement must be avoided, and Miss Vernon, if possible, left entirely to the care of one person.

"Everything depends on the next twenty-four hours, Lady Vernon. I think a crisis in the disease is coming. Leave my patient in Miss Lester's care, and let her have the most perfect quiet until to-morrow, when I shall be here early. It is her one chance!"

"I never heard of a 'crisis' in consumption!" said Lady Vernon, when he had gone; "but he seemed very much in earnest."

"Mamma," said Rosamond, faintly, "I do think he must be right, for that is just what I seem to long for—perfect rest."

Enter Dorcas, with a good-sized parcel.

"It's a present from Mr. Danesleigh, Miss Rose, but I told him you were not well enough to look at it to-day, so I'll just put it inside your wardrobe till you feel a bit better."

Betty had expected Julia to resent her exclusion from the sick room, but, to her surprise, the maid did not express any regrets.

Had she accomplished her fell work already, or did she think that, if any ugly suspicions arose later, it might be convenient to be able to prove she had not even seen Miss Vernon during the last hours of her life?

Betty never forgot that August day—the brilliant sunshine, the bright summer warmth, the song of the birds without, within the utter stillness, and the strange, dread sense of responsibility on her soul.

There was a little ante-room leading to Rosamond's chamber, and on a table there Julia placed a tray for the invalid, besides a dainty repast for Miss Lester.

Betty contrived to convey most of the soup into a bottle, and hide it away for Mr. Elton's inspection to-morrow. Then she explored Mr. Danesleigh's present, and finding a cold chicken and some French rolls she concocted some dainty sandwiches for her charge, which, with a glass of old port wine, formed the most substantial meal the sick girl had partaken of for days. With nourishing jelly and rich, luscious peaches Betty could certainly find enough variety to make her independent of the Castle kitchen.

Lady Vernon came up presently, and would fain have persuaded Betty to go and lie down; but though a delirious at intruding on what might be the mother's last hours with her

daughter made the girl retreat to the ante-room, she knew too well the danger of leaving the field open to Julia to desert her post.

After eleven o'clock, when the household had retired, a strange uneasiness stole over Betty. She was tired to death. She had suffered lately from many sleepless nights, and she had gone through enough that day to break down a stronger frame than hers. What if she yielded to the strange drowsiness that was creeping over her? How would it fare with Rosamond?

To lock the door would have been the easiest precaution; but alas! it was Lady Vernon's custom always to come and look at her daughter in the early morning hours. Betty could only try, by sheer force of will, to keep awake.

Rosamond slept peacefully. The shaded lamp threw the room into half gloom. Betty leant back in a large arm chair, and longed, with an eagerness she had never known before, for morning.

Suddenly, in those weird hours before day-break, which always have something strangely solemn to us when we are watching a sick bed, the door opened, and Julia Webb came slowly in.

Betty rose and confronted her. She regretted it a moment later. Had she only feigned sleep she might perhaps have obtained proof positive of the waiting-maid's guilt.

Julia seemed in no wise disconcerted at finding the watcher awake.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, in a husky whisper, "so I thought I'd just come and ask how Miss Rosamond was. She does look ill, to be sure. I fear there's no hope now."

"I think there is," said Betty, confidently. "If she once gets strong enough to go away she will get up her strength in no time."

Julia smiled in pity for the folly.

"She will never go away from the Castle till she is carried out of it to her grave. You are looking very white and fagged yourself, Miss Lester? Wouldn't you like to sleep a bit? I'd watch by Miss Rosamond gladly, and call you if I saw the slightest change."

But Betty declined firmly. It cost her an effort to frame her refusal civilly.

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

BROAD daylight the next day, a summer noontide, and Mr. Elton visiting his patient. There was genuine pleasure on his kind old face as he examined Rosamond, and noticed her improvement in strength.

"Lady Vernon," he said, "you have known me well nigh thirty years, will you trust me now? Observe the same absolute quiet, the same seclusion from all visitors for two days more, and I promise you you will be electrified at the change!"

"I would do anything," said the mother, sadly, "to restore my darling. But, Mr. Elton, it is the strangest prescription I ever heard of cure a patient by shutting her up and refusing her even the company of her mother. Betty Lester is a good girl, but she has not the least knowledge of illness. Why should she be with Rosamond, and I, her mother, shut out?"

"I asked you to trust me," pleaded the old man. "Forty-eight hours' patience is not much to crave when your child's life hangs on it. I pass you my solemn word I will explain everything to you on Tuesday morning. But for to-day being Sunday I should not need to inflict so long a suspense upon you."

Two strange things happened at the Castle during those forty-eight hours of suspense. Mr. Danesleigh sent his sister-in-law elect another "present" even larger than the first, and Julia Webb disappeared. On Monday evening she received a telegram, which seemed to disturb her strangely, and when the household gathered on Tuesday morning for prayers she was missing.

Lady Vernon had no time to think of her *protégée's* flight. Before she had finished breakfast Mr. Elton called, and with him another gentleman, a Dr. Thompson, whom she knew slightly as a scientific man of some fame, and the public analyst for the district.

The horror and bewilderment of Sir Jasper and his wife knew no bounds when Dr. Thompson broke to them the truth.

Their daughter had never suffered from consumption or other disease. All her distressing symptoms were caused by the administration to her in minute doses of a slow poison called digitalis. Portions of the food supplied to her on Saturday had been submitted to Dr. Thompson, and he had no hesitation in saying that every article had been tampered with.

"Someone has gained entrance to your house with the fell design of compassing your child's death!" said the physician, sternly. "While she was well they had no chance, but the moment she began to have separate meals and little invalid repasts, after her attack of influenza in the spring the cowards saw their opportunity, and used it."

Wilfred Danesleigh appeared at this moment, and carried on the story by telling of Betty's visit to him on the Saturday. He took the half-sheet of paper which had betrayed Julia from his pocket, and showed it to Sir Jasper.

"We owe Rosamond's life to Miss Lester's prompt action and ready wit. Had she wasted time in hesitating or scruples, there is no doubt the murderers would have obeyed the hint contained here, and 'finished' her hateful task. Sir Jasper, it is a painful thing for you, since there seems little doubt Julia Webb is really Julia Vernon, and your nephew's daughter. But for the sake of right and justice she ought not to go unpunished."

"She has taken fright," said the Baronet, gravely. "Julia Webb received a telegram last night, which seemed to upset her. This morning we discovered she had flown. This only confirms your story, Wilfred."

Julia Webb, *alias* Julia Vernon, was never heard of again in Yorkshire. Rosamond recovered gradually but surely, and in the early autumn days she was wedded to the love of her choice, and sailed with him for Fiji, chiefly for the sake of the long sea voyage, but also to rejoice the heart of her father-in-law, whom scientific research still detained in those distant isles.

Betty, deeming her occupation gone, suggested she should return home, but Lady Vernon declared her rightful home was at the Castle. She and Sir Jasper could never lose sight of the girl to whose courage they owed their daughter's life, so it seemed likely for a time that Betty would make her home always at the grand old mansion of the Vernons.

The news from Appleton Rectory was not good. Gladys offended her aunt, and was returned on her parents' hands in three months. Daisy had left school, more because it was difficult to pay the meagre premium for her than that her education was finished. Vera, honest and well-meaning, if rather impractical, was taking the place of the village schoolmistress, and the four others at home seemed divided into two camps—Phyllis and Gladys on the one side, the two young ones on the other.

It was not hopeful. Betty sent them nearly all her salary at Christmas, but did not accept Lady Vernon's offer of a holiday. Early in the new year there came sad tidings from Fiji. Eustace telegraphed that his father had died of fever after three days' illness, so the bridal pair were coming home, and Wilfred was Lord Danesleigh, and emphatically his own master.

He grieved for his father very truly; but the grief did not embitter his life, nor prevent his indulging fresh hopes. In the sweet spring time he rode over to Vernon Castle, and asked Betty to be his wife. She had learned to love him very dearly, and so she did not say him nay, and the family at

Appleton were soon electrified by the news that the "ugly little brown thing" was to be Lady Danesleigh of the Court.

Betty's marriage brought a goodly gift to her kindred. Wilfred presented Mr. Leslie to a living where his learning and old-world courtesy were likely to be appreciated, and where his work was better remunerated than it had ever been at Appleton. The "girls" enjoyed society at last; but, somehow, they never achieved a position in it equal to Betty's. Phyllis entered a sisterhood. Vera became a hospital nurse. Gladys became a faded beauty, never likely to change her name. The three younger ones are still unmarried, and, it must be confessed, though, at their sister's Lady Danesleigh, they have met some of the most eligible men in London, not one of them has ever had an offer.

"Marriage is all look nowadays!" said Monica, somewhat scornfully one day to the other two. "Not one of us has ever had Betty's chance!"

[THE END.]

ALL NERO'S FAULT.

—O—

My name is Annie Myers, and I am a farmer's daughter.

Oh, I don't say that there is anything remarkable in my story, but it seemed very tragic to me at the time, and I know that sometimes these odd jumbles of chance and circumstance are not without interest. It's all over and done with now, but I can't help laughing when I think of it. And yet I remember crying rivers of tears at the time.

People said I was a high-tempered girl. I dare say it may be true, but, all the same, nobody knows how hard I've tried to subdue that quick tongue of mine. Father had a farm and four cows, and we raised turkeys for the market, and eggs and chickens without number as well. He always hired men to help him in the busy seasons, but mother and I had to do every step of the housework, and mother not extra strong at that. Father said it was all nonsense paying a woman to help in the kitchen; it was bad enough hiring men at five shillings a day. He wasn't made of gold, he said, and he was sure he didn't know what we expected. I would have gone into a factory, or taken a place at the mills, if it hadn't been for that, but I couldn't leave mother to bear the brunt of everything herself. It was pretty hard, though, to drudge on, day after day, cooking, washing, scrubbing, rising before light, and lying down late when I saw other girls doing fancy work, taking music lessons, and going about enjoying themselves in pretty dresses and fresh ribbons.

"Perhaps, you'll get a good husband one of these days," said mother, consolingly.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I suppose you call father a good husband?" said I.

"As men go, yes! But you must remember that father has always had a hard row to hoe," said mother, colouring a little—and then I was sorry for what I had said.

"I don't know," I added, "but that the old maids are best off."

Mother laughed.

"I don't believe you'll be an old maid, my dear," said she.

And I think that was one of the reasons that I first began to like George Gibson, because he was so tender and thoughtful of his old aunt and that crippled sister of his. There was always a stout girl to help them, and you never heard of a labour-saving device that was not in the kitchen at Barnside. I often thought what fun it must be to do the housework in a place like that. The kitchen was bright and sunny, not on the north side of the house, like ours, and the floor was covered with bright, pretty-patterned oil cloth to save work, while mother and I often had

sore fingers where splinters from the cheap, uneven boards of the floor had run in while we were scrubbing. There were stationary tubs with water-pipes, not like the crazy old tubs we had to lift in and out and fill with water from a boghead outside; there was a wringer, to save the hands, which often bled after a hard day's work at sheets, pillow-cases and roller-towels that the farm hands had used. In short, there was everything at Barnside, while at home we plodded on in the old toilsome way of our grandmothers and grandfathers.

"Humph!" said my father. "If George Gibson can afford to throw money away, I can't."

And when he used to come and see me once in a way of an evening, and drove me to church in his new trap with the little black horse, I could hardly believe in my own good luck.

"Mother," whispered I, when she once greeted me with a real motherly kiss on my return from a pleasant drive, "do you really think it means anything?"

"I think it means that he admires my Annie very much."

"But, mother—"

"Well, dear?"

"It's all so new to me—so strange," I faltered. "Did father take you out riding? I mean before—"

"Sometimes," she answered.

"Did he say anything very particular? Just at first, I mean?"

"No; but there are looks and tones of the voice, Annie," said my mother, "that mean more than any words."

"But, mother, there are so many prettier girls than I am! Why should any man care for me?"

"Love goes where it is sent, Annie."

I coloured scarlet.

"Love! Oh, mother, do you think it can possibly be that?"

"And besides," said mother, "if you were to look in the glass now, while your cheeks are glowing and your eyes sparkling, you would see that there might be two opinions about your being pretty! And now, dear, come and help me. Father has brought in a great basket of plums, and if we don't cook them to-night they will spoil, for to-morrow and Wednesday are such busy days, you know."

"Oh, mother, why did he bring them to-night? We've done an extra heavy wash to-day, and—"

"He didn't stop to think, Annie."

"He never does stop to think," said I, despairingly.

"He says fruit is going to be so high this year that we cannot buy any, and Mrs. Price let him have these plums for some onions, so the preserves won't really cost us anything."

"Except our strength and labour," sighed I. "It will keep us up until midnight! But I suppose what must be, must be!"

I sat scornfully down to stone plums while mother scoured the big brass kettle that had been Grandmother Myers' before us. Father had never once thought it possible to provide us with a nice porcelain-lined one, such as other people had. There was only a dim candle burning on the table, for father was particularly opposed to extravagance in lights.

"Oh, dear," said I, as I snuffed the wick with a big pair of ancient snuffers—Grandmother Myers again—"will the time ever come when one won't have to count coppers and consider pennies? Nobody burns tallow candles but us!"

The bright autumn evening had clouded into mist and darkness, the rain-drops were beginning to patter down on the roof over our heads. All of a sudden old Nero, the dog, pushed the kitchen door open with his nose and came blundering in, his hair wet and dripping, his feet stained with mud.

In passing the chair where I had carelessly thrown down my bonnet and cape, mother's dress had brushed them to the floor, and old

Nero made at once for this extremity and flung himself at full length on it. I sprang to my feet.

"Get up, you old thing!" I screamed.

"How can you be so clumsy!"

Mother started from the low chair where she sat scouring the kettle. She saw the mischief in a second.

"I didn't mean to do it, Annie!" she cried, with a troubled look at the dog, who grovelled away under the table to escape the wooden platter I flung at him.

I laughed hysterically. In the midst of my rage the ridiculous point of the matter struck me, and at the same instant I saw a pale, thin face in the opposite doorway.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Myers," said George Gibson, as coldly as if his lips were frozen into icicles, "but you left your shawl on the trap seat. I have brought it back to you. Good-evening."

"I stood rooted to the floor. Mother, with the brass kettle in one hand, was speechless. Nero, from his vantage-ground beneath the table, eyed the scene guiltily for a minute. Then I burst out laughing.

"An unfortunate minute for him to appear on the stage!" said I. "Oh, Nero! Nero! you're worse than Sir Isaac Newton's little puppy dog! Shall I ever get the pinches out of my poor toque?"

"I am so sorry, Annie!" said mother. "It was all my fault."

"No, it wasn't," said I, cheerfully. "Originally it was the fault of the girl who dropped her bonnet on a chair instead of putting it in its proper place in the closet under the stairs. I daresay I can furnish it up somehow. Is the kettle nearly done?—because I've got a lot of plums ready. Oh, mother! do you suppose he would have stayed to spend the evening if he hadn't heard me scolding like a virago?"

The autumn leaves rustled down. The winter snows covered them up with pearl, and that was the last visit I had from George Gibson.

The sleighing season, to which I had looked forward with such happy anticipation, signified nothing to me, for our old red sleigh had gone to ruin, and father, "guessed we could get along tolerably well on wheels."

I saw the Gibson sleigh dart by many a time, but it never stopped at our gate. I saw George in church now and then, when I could be spared to go, but his sole greeting was a ceremonious bow.

Mother felt worse about it than I did. But what could we do?

"Mother," I said one day, "couldn't I go to him and ask him frankly what the matter is?"

Mother shook her head.

"No, Annie," said she. "A woman can never take the first step without losing her self-respect. She must always wait for the man to come to her. There is certainly some misunderstanding, but it will all come right at last. Don't fret, Annie, don't fret, my own darling!"

As if I could have helped it.

Sarah Clarke came in one day to ask us to subscribe to some fashion journal.

"Such a joke!" said she, laughing. "I never knew before that you were such a shrew, Annie Myers. That you called your mother 'a clumsy old thing,' and threw a wooden platter at her."

"I!" cried I.

"Fanny Gibson says so. She declares that George heard and saw it for himself. He wouldn't have believed it on anyone else's testimony. And she says it half broke George's heart, for he was beginning to think a good deal of you, Annie!"

I stared at Sarah in amazement, but all of a sudden mother sprang up.

"Annie, Annie!" she cried, "this explains all. Don't you remember Nero and the bonnet?"

And she told Sarah Clarke the whole story, almost crying and quite laughing as she talked.

Sarah Clarke clapped her hands gleefully. "That's the way that many a fancy grows into a fact," says she. "Well, I shall go straight to Fanny Gibson, and tell her how it really was."

And neither mother nor I forbade her. Mother kissed me softly when she was gone.

"Mother," said I, "do you think—"

"I don't think, Annie," said she, "I only hope."

And then we hurried back to our work, for father was coming up the path, and he never had any patience for what he called "woman's sentimentalities."

That evening George Gibson called, just as he had been used to do.

"Annie," said he, when at last we had an opportunity to speak quietly to each other, "can you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive, George!"

"Yes, there is. A man who could believe that you were an unfaithful daughter, an ill-tempered shrew, needs a whole year's stock of forgiveness. And you'll have to do it all, Annie, for I shall never forgive myself. What, crying? This will never do—no, never!"

And somehow before the clock struck nine we were engaged.

And we are to be married in six weeks. And mother is to come and make us a long visit in haying-time, while Aunt Mary keeps house for father, and I am so very, very happy.

"You are the best little prophesies in the world, mother," I keep saying, in the full tide of my happiness. "For you know you told me all along that everything would come right at last!"

FACETIE.

The piano-tuner is the man who works that others may play.

No wife ever made a hit by striking for more housekeeping money before breakfast.

EXTRACT from music-hall ditty: "What's the matter with Ireland? She's all riot."

Odd things about books and shoes: they're always soled before you buy them.

PARADOXICAL as it may seem, a sharp answer is synonymous with a blunt reply.

It is a good plan to never become well acquainted with the people who have been held up to you as shining examples.

"You say your brother is younger than you, yet he looks older?" "Yes, he has seen a great deal of trouble—but I never married."

The man who sits down on the road to success and waits for a free ride is sure to be left.

ELDERLY SUITOR: "I have spoken to your mother, Helen, and—" Helen: "Oh, I'm so glad! Did she accept you?"

JUDGE: "How do you know the prisoner made a great disturbance?" Policeman: "He woke me up."

It is strange how a man, who admits himself to be a fool, will go just raving mad if anybody else tells him the same thing.

"Did she thank you for the seat?" "No; but after she had settled down in it she smiled sweetly and begged me not to rise."

YOUNG MAN: "Yes, I can mimic anybody. Did you ever see me take your daughter off?" Old Gentleman: "No, but I'd like to."

SOMEBODY has solved the great problem of finding a needle in a bundle of hay. Sit on the hay.

EVER since Rebecca's adventure at the well, watering-places have been favorite resorts for ladies with hymeneal hauserings.

TORCH CHARACTER (entering theatre): "Do yer pass the profess?" Manager: "Yes, but I don't know you." Torch Character: "Hain't my looks 'nuff ter identify me? I'm one o' der new pugilistic stars!" Manager (quaking): "Pass in."

WIFE: "Did you make a minute of the pastor's sermon this morning?" Husband: "Yes; several. There were enough of them to make an hour."

A FAULTLESS REPLY.—Examiner in Physics: "What happens when a light falls into the water at an angle of forty-five degrees?" Pupil: "It goes out."

HE (mathetic, as they went down to supper): "Agh, d'you like stobings?" She (from the country): "Ye es, but I don't think I'll take any to-night; it's rather late."

The lean of an umbrella to a man who will return it next morning certain is said to be the most perfect example in existence of faith, hope, and charity combined.

The polite reporter wrote that "Miss Chromatic rendered several piano pieces," but the printer set up that she "rended the piano to pieces."

A WEALTHY young lawyer spent two days and a night over one case, and at the end of that time could not tell which side he was on. It was a case of champagne.

MAMMA: "Millie, I hear that at the office to-day you refused to get up and give papa's lady typewriter your chair. How could you be so rude?" Millie: "I didn't have no chair! I was sitting on papa's lap!"

EMPLOYER: "I understand, McFlynn, that the men have all struck?" McFlynn: "Yes, sorr." Employer: "But what for?" McFlynn: "Well, we dunno yit, sorr! The walkin' dilly-gate ain't come around to tell us!"

"On what ground, Mr. Cautious, do you propose to break our engagement?" "There's no ground, Miss Bellows; that's the trouble. I had supposed when we became engaged that you owned a large farm."

COAL DEALER (anxiously): "Hold on! That load hasn't been weighed. It looks to me rather large for a ton." Driver: "Tain't intended for a ton. It's two tons." Dealer: "Beg pardon. Go ahead."

MOTHER: "It is very naughty of you, Edith, to keep interrupting while I was talking to the ladies this afternoon. You must always wait until we stop, and then you may speak." Edith: "Yes, but you never stop, ma."

LITTLE GIRL: "Your papa has only got one leg, hasn't he?" Veteran's Little Girl: "Yes." Little Girl: "Where's his other one?" Veteran's Little Girl: "Hush dear; it's in heaven."

HE (slightly rude): "I called because I thought you were out." She (sweetly): "Well, do you know, I thought I was out, too. The maid must have thought you were some one else."

"I LOVE this old horse," said the Colonel. "I feel that he saved my life." "How?" "He kicked me in the waistcoat before the battle so that I couldn't go on the field, and my substitute got shot in the back."

PROFESSOR, a little distracted: "I'm very glad to see you. How's your wife?" "I regret it, professor, but I'm not married." "Ah, yes; then, of course, your wife's still single?"

SOME IN AN OMNIBUS.—This man endeavouring to wedge his body into a seat: "This bus ought to charge by weight." Stout Woman (contemptuously): "If it did it would never stop to pick you up."

Too CLOSE.—"Suddenly," said the major, "the Indians were upon us. They scalped me and left me for dead, but I managed to crawl into the camp and was saved." "That was a close shave," said Hicks. "Yes," said the Major, rubbing his wig, "close to the bone."

ATTORNEY: "Now, mark me well, sir! Do I understand you to say that you were standing within ten feet of the parties when the fight began?" Witness (to the Court): "Your Honor, have I got to answer that question?" The Court: "I see nothing wrong in the question. You may answer it." Witness (to attorney): "Well, sir, I don't know whether you understand me to say it or not."

DISTRESSED young mother (travelling with weeping infant): "Dear, dear, I don't know what to do with this baby." Kind and thoughtful bachelor (in next seat): "Madam, shall I open the window for you?"

"So you would not take me to be twenty?" said a young lady to her partner, while dancing the polka a few evenings ago. "What would you take me for, then?" "For better, for worse," replied he.

MRS. YOURHUSBAND: "I would like half-a-dozen new-laid eggs. Mr. Storey, if you please. The last were not at all fresh." The Wicked Shopkeeper: "The fact is, madam, that at this time of the year the hens are not yielding any new-laid ones."

JUDGE: "If you know of any mitigating circumstance you are at liberty to state it." Prisoner: "I don't know of any except that I took to stealing because I didn't want to loaf about the street corners and be taken for a detective."

LAURA (blushing furiously): "Indeed, George didn't kiss me. We only stepped into the conservatory a moment to look at the flowers." Irene: "Well, wipe that dark-coloured pomatum off your lips and let's go into the parlour again."

CONVERSATION SUITED TO THE DAY.—Mamma: "My dears, you should not talk about students on Sunday; it is not right." Ella and Carrie (in chorus): "But, mamma, we're talking about theological students." Mamma (with sigh of relief): "Oh!"

PRETTY WIFE (poutingly): "That Mrs. De Plaine has a dozen dresses handsomer than the only good one I've got." Smart Husband: "A homely woman like that needs rich attire to attract attention from her face. You don't." (Pretty wife subsides.)

"THEY say Tony's injuries were the result of a practical joke." "Yes. The chappie told him that a big, burly fellow in the bar was deaf and dumb, and Tony walked over to him with a sweet smile, and told him he was a fool." "Well?" "The man wasn't deaf and dumb."

BOBBY laboriously lugged a pail into the parlour, where the family was assembled, and asked the maternal grandmother to kick it. "Why should I kick it, Bobby?" grandma inquired in amazement. "Just to amuse pa," said Bobby. "He said he would give £5 any time to see you kick the bucket."

"Now, look here," said the professor to the infuriated bull, "you are my superior in strength. I am your superior in mind. Let me arbitrate this matter, and see which should by right get the better of our controversy." "Oh, no," replied the bull, "let's toss up for it." The professor lost.

"So you went to the theatre last night," said one young man to another. "Yes, but I didn't stay long." "How did you like what you saw?" "First rate." "What was it like?" "Well, it was a grey felt with a beaver crown, dead loads of plumes and clusters of some of the prettiest moire ribbons you ever beheld."

"I HAVEN'T any sympathy with you," snapped out Mrs. Brown. "Experience never teaches you men anything. Here's the second time you have fallen down the cellar." "What are you talking about?" growled the old man, rubbing his shins. "Didn't we move since then, and ain't this a different cellar?"

PROFESSOR TODHUNTER: "How long it has been since we met, my dear Mrs. Goldwin? Who could imagine that you have a daughter as old as Miss Priscilla, there? And little Pass—well, just think of her being in society!" Mrs. Goldwin: "Yes, Dr. Todhunter; I can't realise these things myself. Priscilla is twenty to-day." Professor Todhunter: "Why, my dear Mrs. Goldwin, you don't tell me so! And only ten short years ago I remember her so well as a romping little chit of sixteen! Well, how marvellously these girls do grow!"

SOCIETY.

THE PRINCE OF WALES has again honoured some of the leading actors by entertaining them at dinner, this time at the Marlborough Club.

The latest novelty for a truly *riche* travelling gown is securing cloth, a material which has hitherto been devoted to house-maid's work.

It is quite possible that the Queen may go at Easter to Homburg, where the Empress Frederick is to pass the spring.

MASCULINE chivalry is only possible so long as woman retains her weakness and her womanliness. As soon as she begins to be unfeminine and aggressive, chivalry at once becomes ludicrously out of place.

At the opera a few evenings ago, the wife of one of the hereditary millionaires of New York wore a genuine real all-gold-and-jewelled crown constructed at a cost of 300,000 dol.

THE EMPEROR William has privately intimated that he would prefer to visit England early in June before his cruise to Norway; but the date of his arrival will not be fixed until he meets the Queen at Darmstadt in April.

A MOST novel and important feature in our headgear is the turban, modified in form at present, it is true; but the fashion having once crept in, who can foretell how it will spread?

CHRISTINA of Spain, is quite herself again, and was able to preside at the postponed banquet, which should have taken place in honour of the little King's birthday, but had to be deferred until his mamma's recovery.

THE latest thing with the fashionable girl in America is a belt of beautiful bright gold. It is soft, pliable, and smooth-like satin, and is fastened by an exquisitely wrought gold buckle.

THE statement will be received with universal pleasure that latterly her Royal Highness the Duchess of Fife has greatly improved in health.

AMERICAN girls have discovered that there is nothing like active exercise to build up a good figure and produce a good complexion, so during the winter indoor tennis has been a most popular pastime.

THE Queen did a gracious and thoughtful thing in asking the tenants and employes on the Osborne estate to a performance of the plays in which Princess Louise (Marchioness of Lorne) and Princess Henry of Battenberg took part. Very keenly did they appreciate the honour, and very thoroughly did they enjoy the performance.

Wax is hitherforth to seal all our missives, but Fashion on this side of the Channel has decreed that only shades of red shall be used for the purpose. Anything from pale pink to scarlet will be permissible, but all other colours are ruled out.

A VERY unique idea for the engaged young lady is to wear on a tiny gold chain round her neck a pendant in the shape of a heart, the gem forming the latter being the lucky stone of the month in which she was born. One of the newest styles in pins for a young girl is the simple forget-me-not heart. The engagement bangle, with a gold heart forming the padlock, is dainty and quite suggestive. They are often made much more elaborate by having the bangle proper composed of any gem which may suit the fair recipient.

DURING the past one-and-twenty years no less than ninety-seven peerages have been created, and fifty-six have become extinct. One hundred and forty-four gentlemen have received the handle "Sir" to their names, in the form of Baronetcies, and as many as eighty-two have become extinct, whilst the so-called honour of Knighthood has been conferred upon one thousand one hundred and six persons.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 27 railway tunnels in England all over 1½ miles in length.

An envelope machine turns out 2,700 envelopes per hour.

THE factories of England, France, Germany, and Holland produce about seventy-seven million pins daily.

THE vulture is 100 times as large as the swallow, but its wings are only 15 times as large. The Australian crane weighs 3,000,000 times as much as the common gnat, yet the latter has 150 times as much wing surface per unit of weight.

PAUPERS in England in receipt of relief on July 1, 1890, numbered, in 618 unions and parishes, 739,003—a proportion of 25.1 to every 1,000 of the estimated population, the smallest number since 1879, and the smallest proportion at the same date of any recorded since the returns were first made.

GEMS.

LIFE consists in the alternate process of learning and unlearning, but it is often wiser to unlearn than to learn.

If you don't wish a man to do a thing get him to talk about it; for the more men talk the more likely they are to do nothing else.

WE judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.

GORTSE said: "There are three classes of readers; some enjoy without judgment, others judge without enjoyment, and some there are who judge while they enjoy, and enjoy while they judge."

PUNISHMENT is a fruit that, unsuspected, ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and end, seed and fruit cannot be severed, for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PEGGY'S APPLE PUDDING.—A pint of flour, one heaping teaspoonful of yeast powder, a half teaspoonful of salt, a teaspoonful of butter. Mix with milk stiff enough to roll out. Cut up apples and put in the pudding dish, cover with the paste, set in a steamer, closely covered, and steam three hours. The water must not stop boiling.

COCONUT PUDDING.—Take off the brown skin and grate a coconut, mix the milk of the nut with half pint of milk, mix the coconut with three tablespoonfuls of bread crumbs and the same of sugar, pour the milk over it, add two eggs (well beaten) and a little vanilla flavour—a little cream or one teaspoon of butter is an improvement—put in a pie dish, and bake rather slowly for about one hour.

TREACLE SCONES.—Half poned flour, two ounces currants, one teaspoonful treacle, half teaspoonful of soda, a pinch of tartaric acid, two teaspoonfuls of sugar. Put the flour and all the dry things into a basin, mix the treacle and a little buttermilk together, and mix to a soft dough. Make into a scone, roll out the ordinary thickness, and either cut in round scones or square, and bake on the griddle or in the oven.

EXCELLENT GINGERBREAD.—One-half cup of butter filled up with warm water, one cup of molasses, one-half teaspoonful of salt, one-half teaspoonful of ginger, one heaping teaspoonful best cinnamon, one-quarter teaspoonful cloves, if liked, finely powdered, one teaspoonful soda, dissolved in one tablespoonful warm water, flour to make batter not stiffer than for muffins. This quantity makes three thin jelly cake tin sheets.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Forty per cent. of the heat of an ordinary fire goes up the chimney.

A TEACHER of mathematics says that the simple tearing up or cutting of paper is a great relief to the mind after mental labour.

A MATHEMATICIAN estimates that a machine of one-horse power would keep twenty-seven million watches running.

THE earliest manufacture of storied tapestry was about the end of the twelfth century, when the Flemish weavers began to use the low warp and high warp looms.

WHEN the chickens first begin to move in the egg, just before hatching, the mother hen sings to them a low, crooning song, never heard at any other time.

A FINE historic smelting furnace has been discovered in New Mexico. Near by a bar of pure silver was found. The furnace had been filled with ore and never fired.

ALL the gold we have, if melted down into a mass, could be contained in a room thirty feet square and twenty feet high—and would weigh about 10,500 tons.

A NEW industry for females has lately come into public notice. They go from house to house among the wealthy classes, supplied with spirits of ammonia, and other detergents, and solicit employment to remove stains from costly garments.

CURIOSLY enough, the north has had the fine weather all to itself this winter. It has been a charming season in Sweden and Norway, and from the former boxes of lilacs of the valley, hyacinths, and roses have arrived for the London market.

IN the year 1200 chimneys were scarcely known in England. Only one was allowed to a religious house, one in a manor house, and one in the great hall of a castle or lord's house, but in other houses the smoke found its way out as best it could.

THE largest barometer yet made has just been put in working order in the St. Jacques tower in Paris. It is 12.65 metres high, was manufactured in St. Denis, and was carried by six men to Paris in a strong wooden frame.

AN acre of bananas will support twenty-five times as many persons as an acre of wheat. One thousand square feet of land, growing bananas, will produce four thousand pounds of nutritious substance. The same space, devoted to wheat or potatoes will produce only thirty-three pounds of wheat, or ninety-nine pounds of potatoes.

To prevent the spread of skin disease by infection, a Lyons *coiffeur* now disinfects his tools by a surgical stove which heats them to a temperature of 120 deg. cent. The razors are mounted in aluminium, and the scissors nicked. These and the brushes are first washed, and then disinfected by the intense heat before use, like a surgeon's instruments.

CRESCOS come from Crete, the cauliflower from Cyprus, and asparagus from Asia. We are indebted to Italy for the ohevil, to Portugal and Spain for the dill seed, to the Canary Islands for fennel, and to Egypt for anised and parsley. Garlic is a production of the East. Shallots come from Siberia, and the horseradish from China. We are indebted to the East Indies for kidney beans, to Astracan for pumpkins, and to France for lentils.

HEAR is an instance of the difficulties attending census operations in Bengal: A "Handi,"—that is, a family—is the present unit of the census system, but the word also means a cooking pot. An enumerator received instructions to count the "handis" in his block, and he accordingly walked into a house and began to count the cooking pots of the alarmed household, under the idea that he was thus forwarding census operations. This is an actual incident, vouched for by a census officer.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BUTCHER WILKES.—The 19th of November, 1862, was on Wednesday.

SPORTSMAN.—There is no close time for hares in England.

PERPLEXED HOUSEHOLDER.—The former landlord can recover the arrears of rent.

CREDITOR.—A person under twenty-one cannot be made legally liable for debts contracted by him.

A. S. E.—Two halfpenny stamps may be used in giving a receipt.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—An IOU is, in itself, no security, and can only be used as evidence of debt.

F. S. T.—Ole Bull was a famous Norwegian violinist. He died in 1880.

FRANCAIS.—Particulars of the French army are given in "The Statesman's Year Book."

MISTRESS.—A domestic servant is liable to pay for "breakages" caused wilfully or by gross carelessness.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—A gun license is available only for the person in whose name it is taken out.

AMATEUR.—The plectrum was the small ivory instrument with which the ancients struck the lyra.

A LOYAL SUBJECT.—The Queen laid the foundation-stone of the Victoria Law Courts on March 25th, 1887.

MAY.—Address the Secretary, General Post Office. The registration fee is only a few shillings.

A QUEERIST.—New coins can be obtained through any banker.

CREDITOR.—The landlord can sue for the debt in the county court.

CLAUDE.—We know of no law to prevent pigeon-flying in the locality indicated.

PHOENIX.—No, we think you could get a form of assignment from the office of the Insurance Company.

A READER.—1. We cannot say. 2. The largest bell in England is "Great Paul," at St. Paul's. Its weight is 16 tons 14 cwt. 2 qrs. 19 lb.

CRADOCK.—Freemasonry is said to have originated in the gathering of craftsmen to build Solomon's temple. You may as well believe that as anything else.

HORACE.—We do not know "the diameter of the largest driving-wheel used on the Great Northern Railway locomotives."

YOUNG HOUSEWIFE.—Unless the disobedience is so gross as to justify immediate dismissal, you must give the servant the customary month's notice.

HADEN.—The rocks of Hell's Gate were blown up to give free admission of large steamers to New York harbour on the 24th September, 1876.

DIDIMER.—We advise you to have nothing to do with them. We cannot say they are not genuine, but we think them delusive.

AMATEUR.—We are not aware that designs for violins are obtainable anywhere outside of a book on violin making.

L. E. E.—Cockades are entitled to be worn by servants of masters serving under the Crown in the army and navy and of deputy lieutenants.

A HEARTBROKEN WIFE.—The practice is a usual one, but she could get the amount refunded. Application forms may be obtained at the Inland Revenue Office.

AMOR.—The newest engagement rings are made in the shape of a heart. This rather pretty fancy comes from Paris, where it has become an established fact.

RESTITUTION.—The only plan would be to take proceedings in the county court, but we think you would be acting wisely in letting the matter drop.

A DECEIVED HUSBAND.—A husband is only responsible for debts contracted by his wife before the marriage if he has profited by the property so acquired.

JULIA CARRAR.—The author of the hymn was Nahum Tate, at one time poet-laureate of England, who was born in 1652 and died in 1715.

NOM DE PLUME.—"Owen Meredith" was the pen-name of the second Baron Lytton, the son of the noted English author commonly known as Bulwer.

LEX.—A married woman can dispose by will of property which is really her own in any way she may please.

ETIQUETTE.—In case the lady has an older sister the card should contain the former. If she has no sister it should contain merely "Miss Smith."

MAUD MULLER.—About five tons of gunpowder exploded on a barge on the Regent's Canal on October 2, 1874.

MERCURY.—The lowest temperature recorded at Greenwich Observatory during the recent frost was 12 degrees, on January 10, this being 20 degrees of frost.

COMPETITOR.—Application with reference to Post Office appointments should be made to the Civil Service Commissioners, Cannon-row, Westminster, London.

ANTIQUITY.—All of the so-called Seven Wonders of the are now non-existent—the statue of Colossus at Rhodes, the temple of Diana at Ephesus, the tomb of Mausolus, the lighthouse on the Pharos, the hanging gardens of Babylon, and the Statue of Jupiter Olympus by Phidias.

IN PERPLEXITY.—We can only suggest that you should apply for advice to the Consul-General for the Transvaal in this country.

A CONSTANT READER.—If policemen have been hired for the purpose they will quell any disturbance in the hall; but if not hired they will not even enter until they are called upon.

ONE IN DIFFICULTIES.—In the absence of any special agreement, six months' notice must be given, to expire on the date corresponding to that on which the tenancy commenced.

A GEOGRAPHICAL INQUIRER.—A Levee is an artificial embankment along the margin of a river to prevent inundation. The banks of the Mississippi, the Loire, the Rhine, and the Po are defended in this manner.

INDIGNANT MAUD.—No use. It is an old, old story of wrong done in name of law. There will be no end to it until people generally come to look on the specious sewing machine agent as a person to be avoided.

A ROVER.—You can remove the gasfittings which you brought, providing that can be done without injury to the property; but you cannot take out gas-piping attached to the walls.

IGNORAMUS.—To sweeten a refrigerator, remove everything out of it, clean it thoroughly with soap and water, and then set inside, on a china plate, a piece of unslaked lime, and let it slake while in the refrigerator.

ALIAS.—There is nothing to prevent the use of the adopted name, but a change of name is usually made by a deed, which is enrolled in Chancery. Any lawyer would tell you how to proceed.

BOCANIST.—Lichen, the name of the plant referred to, is pronounced li-ken, or lih-en. As a medical word, Smart pronounces it li-ken, but as a botanical term, lich-on.

THE BITTER AND THE SWEET.

"LAUGH, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone;"

For the pleasures of earth bring companions,
While our sorrows are all our own.

But the grief-stricken heart of the mourner,
With none but its Maker nigh,
Can turn from the mirth and pleasures of earth
To the promise written on high.

Those promises give the assurance
That after life's journey is o'er
We may dwell in the realm of the blessed;
We may cross to the heavenly shore.
Though our pathway on earth may be dreary,
And burdened by many a care,
We may trust in the word of Jesus our Lord:
"I go, a place to prepare."

The last moments spent with the dying,
Of all moments, pass the fleetest;
But the loving words uttered by dying lips,
Scent of all sweet words the sweetest.
We may yet see the silver lining,
Though now all seems darkness and sorrow;
For the clouds of to-day shall all roll away,
And the sun will be shining to-morrow.

J. H. S.

WIKIE.—Hong Kong is 0,780 miles from London; the average steamship passage is forty-six days. The climate is subject to sudden changes, and is not particularly healthy. It is a naval and military colony.

N. G. O.—A youth of seventeen can enlist without his parents' consent, only by making a false statement, for which he could be punished, and his parents could reclaim him.

NUISANCE.—The ants may be taught a lesson by scolding their haunts and putting Scotch snuff wherever they are in the habit of going for food. Set the legs of desks and furniture in shallow cups of water.

MEG MERRILLER.—Rusty-nail water will often remove freckles when everything else fails. Glycerine diluted with fresh lemon-juice will also aid in removing them, if not of long standing.

TOM BOWLING.—Apprentice need not go to navigation school except he intends to go up to pass as mate. If he prefers he can ship as an ordinary seaman, and continue to sail as such all his days.

A SCIENTIFIC INQUIRER.—1. Rutherfordium and osmium are metals which occur in platinum ores. 2. The price of silver is regulated by the ordinary laws of supply and demand.

"NORTH COUNTRY."—Published monthly, price 1s. on or about twenty-fifth of each month. When last we came across it it was published in Great Queen-street. Ask a good news-vendors' shop for it.

TROUBLED AGNES.—A man cannot love two women at once; one must go to the wall. We should advise you to have nothing more to do with so fickle and undecided a person.

NEW STARTER.—We should be very glad to help you if we could, but your questions are entirely about matters of trade of which we have no knowledge. You must apply to someone in the business in both instances.

VIOLINIST.—The Stradivarius "stamp" or label on your violin is one of the very commonest tricks of trade practiced by sellers. Your instrument may be a very good one for all that, but not as surely was not made by Stradivarius. The value of his productions are so counted for, and their whereabouts known.

EMIGRANT.—1. Situations in colonies as elsewhere are only to be had by asking for them and proving special fitness (musical ability in your case) for the position. 2. You may call it an apprenticeship, though it is rather a training.

RACHUS.—Rhenish wines are those produced on both sides of the Rhine. They include some of the best wines in the world, but as a general thing the Rhenish wines imported into this country are cheap wines of low grade.

JACK SHEPARD.—The notorious Burke was hanged at Edinburgh on 25th January, 1829. He had committed sixteen murders. Hare, his companion, died most miserably years after in London. He had been blind for some time previous.

ARTHUR.—Cultivate your artistic taste for amusement's sake to the meantime. There is no opening for it, that is the actual fact. But the more you cultivate the better you will become, and prospects may be worth counting a year or two hence.

S. A.—Brazil's greatest length is about 2,600 miles, and the extent of its coast line is nearly 3,800 miles. The area, officially estimated, is 3,388,000 square miles. The area of the United States and Territories is 3,580,242 square miles.

CHRISTOPHER.—Either New South Wales or Victoria (Sydney or Melbourne) would do; but, frankly, we do not think there is enough to be got to pay for the £30 to £35 that must be spent to get there. Wages are from £35 to £45, with board and lodging.

PHYLLIS.—The essence of bergamot, which enters most largely into commerce, is obtained by rasping the peel of the fragrant citron, and collecting the essence thus disengaged. One hundred bergamots of Nice, in the neighbourhood of which it is produced abundantly, yield two-and-a-half ounces of oil.

INITIALS.—Custom, which is law in the case, has decreed that the initial letters of a name should always be capitals. The contrary instances you quote are evidence of eccentricity, let us say (though self-conceit would more properly describe it), on the part of an individual who is sensible he has no other way of distinguishing himself.

EMIGRATION.—1. Storage fare to Durban, 17 to 18 guineas. 2. Steamer takes about 33 days. 3. Climate very fine. 4. We can give no information regarding carrier's work in the States. But as regards admission to the country, if you look like a man who can work for his maintenance—are neither sickly nor ragged—you will be allowed to pass.

LAND O' CAKES.—We are not quite sure that we know what you mean by the "old Scotch Crown." The one in Edinburgh Castle was really the Scottish Crown, and played its part at the coronation of some of the later kings; but it is doubtful if any part of it is older than Robert Bruce. Indeed, it is almost certain it is not so old. The "old" crown is believed to have been carried off to England.

DORA DRAWE.—It occurs in Tennyson's "In Memoriam." In speaking of the constant nipping and crushing of the hopes and prayers of human beings, the poet says:—

"Oh, mother, praying God to save
Thy sailor—while thy head is bowed,
His heavy-shot hammock-shroud
Drops in his fast and wandering grave."

CECILIA.—St. Cecilia was a Christian martyr of the third century, that much is known for certain. "The story" that you refer to about her bringing an angel down from Heaven with her harp is only one of a hundred or more absurd legends about her. It is understood that she was gifted with a fine voice, and used it in her acts of worship with great effect; hence she is assumed as the patroness of music, and in the many pictures of her she is invariably represented with an instrument in her hand.

BOOK WORM.—In the author's preface to the "Heart of Mid-Lothian," you will find that Sir Walter Scott says that the dramatic incident on which the story turns—the journey of Jeanie Deans on foot to London to obtain pardon for her sister Effie, who had been condemned to death for child murder—was unmistakably real, the name of the heroine being, however, Helen Walker, a native of Dumfries, who lived near Hinkley, and is now buried in the churchyard at Irongray, in the county. Of course Scott had only the bare fact to work upon; the incidents of the journey, including the interview with the Queen, are all suppositions. The "Duke of Argyle at once obtained the pardon desired by Helen Walker," says the authentic record.

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